

THE  
VILLAGE SHIELD  
A STORY OF MEXICO

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RUTH GAINES & GEORGIA WILLIS READ



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# THE VILLAGE SHIELD







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# THE VILLAGE SHIELD

A STORY OF MEXICO

BY  
RUTH GAINES  
AND  
GEORGIA WILLIS READ



NEW YORK  
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PREFACE

The full-page illustrations for this book have been taken from three famous books of travel, written in each case by men of science, viz.: *Six Months Residence and Travels in Mexico*, by W. Bullock, London, 1824; *Mitla, Travels in Mexico and Guatemala*, by G. F. von Temp-sky, London, 1858; and *Mexico, Landscapes and Popular Sketches*, by C. Sartorius, London, 1859. The two former authors made their own sketches; the latter had the good fortune to secure those of the no less famous artist, Moritz Rugendas.

The tailpieces and line drawings have been redrawn from the beautiful picture-writings of the Indians. Some of these antedate, and others are contemporaneous with, the Spanish Conquest.

It is felt, by the authors, and the publishers,

## PREFACE

that the veracious delineations here reproduced represent as truly now as when they were first drawn, the life of Mexico. In addition, they possess unusual historic and artistic interest, which should render them of permanent value to all students of that wonderful land.

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THE VILLAGE SHIELD



## A LETTER TO THE ONE WHO READS THIS BOOK

*Dear Schoolmate:—*

This is a story of real Mexicans; not the fierce and noisy men who are fighting and quarreling among themselves and sometimes with us, to decide who shall govern their nation, but the Indians of pure blood, the descendants or successors of the Aztec people whom the Spaniards found in Mexico when Fernando Cortés invaded the country in 1520. There are about one hundred and fifty of these Indian tribes, and four-fifths of the people of Mexico have some Indian blood in their veins. When you read the adventures of Porfiria and Ramon, you may find it hard to believe that these gentle, courteous, cleanly, honorable people are in any way connected with the excitable, untidy, and often untrustworthy natives of whom we read in the newspapers; or that the pretty village

by the lake, and the beautiful valley with its delightful cave can be a part of that dry, hot, treeless land which our soldier-boys know as Mexico. But such authorities as Sartorius,<sup>1</sup> the German naturalist, and Mme. Calderon de la Barca,<sup>2</sup> the English wife of the Spanish ambassador, give us in their famous books on Mexico glimpses of the Indians which show that their native courtliness and dignity can scarcely be overdrawn. Of these, the Tarascos, Porfiria's Indian tribe, are descendants of an early people who rivaled the Aztecs in civilization and power, and are even now noted for their orators and the songs of their women. As for the cave, which seems so like a fairy place, there are many others in Mexico, more fairy-like, as you may read some day; and the valley is so real that it waits, perhaps for your exploration, in a cleft of the Sierra Madre.

<sup>1</sup> C. Sartorius: "Mexico, Landscapes and Popular Sketches," Trübner and Co., London, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Mme. Calderon de la Barca: "Life in Mexico," Boston and London, 1843.

But no story of modern Mexico could be true which did not tell us something of the misery of the people, the poverty, the cruel oppression, the unending civil war ; and all these things you will find in the story of the Village Shield. Still, the story pictures for us more happiness than horror, more peace than war. In its pages you can see what a useful, joyful life the Mexican Indians might all be leading to-day, if all the white men in Mexico were as kind and wise as Don Luis and his wife, and if all the priests were as loving and good as the Padre who took care of Porfiria and Ramon and little Félix. The priests in Mexico have not all been so devoted to the Indians and so willing to lift them out of their poverty and ignorance, but there are two priests whom the grateful Mexicans will never forget. In the sixteenth century Bishop Quiroga took the part of the natives of the province of Michoacan against the Spanish rulers, who burned their Indian chief to death because he would not obey them ; and in 1810 the Padre Miguel Hidalgo, a parish

priest in a little town called Dolores, near the city of Guanajuato, led the first actual uprising of the Mexicans in their long struggle for independence. Padre Hidalgo was captured by the Spanish authorities and shot in prison at Chihuahua, on July 31, 1811, but the torch of liberty which he carried so bravely was handed on to other patriots.

And as there have been some good priests in Mexico, so too there have been kind white men, like Porfiria's Don Luis; men who have looked out for the welfare of the *peones* on the great estates and in the mines. But, in general, the white men who have gone to Mexico in the last fifty years,—from England, France, Germany, Belgium, Japan, the United States,—have been chiefly concerned with making money out of Mexico and using the riches of the country,—the fertile soil and the mines,—to increase their own power and fill their own pockets. They have thought of themselves first and of Mexico afterwards. And we all know that the man or woman, or boy or girl,

who thinks of himself first, has not usually much thought left over for other people. The good neighbor is one who stands ready to give a helping hand to the man next door, not to go in and rob his pantry. And Mexico is our neighbor.

Of course, it is natural for the energetic, educated business men from northern countries, who invest money in Mexico, to be impatient with the slow and primitive methods of the Indians and Meztizos, or half-breeds, and to want to take everything into their own hands and "speed up" Mexico. But one of the things which neighbors have to learn is not to meddle. To help without meddling is something that very few nations, or individuals, have learned to do, to-day. We cannot always be sure that "the way we do it at home" is the best way to do it next door. We cannot be sure that the Mexican Indians will never make for themselves a peaceable, efficient government, merely because they haven't done it yet. The Spaniards and Meztizos have been trying

for four hundred years to conquer the Indian, and the result has been a see-saw of revolution and tyranny, but the Indian is still clinging to his mountains and fighting for his lands.

And you must not think of him as always an ignorant *peón* wrapped in a bright, hand-woven blanket. Many lawyers and professional men of eminence in Mexico have been Indians of pure blood. Mexico's greatest president, Benito Juarez, was a Zapoteca Indian, and the story of his life is even more romantic than anything you will find in the story of Porfiria and Ramon. His father and mother were both Indians of the Zapoteca tribe, and they lived on the shores of a mountain tarn called the Enchanted Lake, near the city of Oaxaca. Little Benito was born in March, 1806, in an adobe hut with a thatched roof. His father and mother died when he was three years old, and he lived until he was twelve with his grandmother, and knew no language but the Zapoteca dialect. But his tribe were known for their industry and hon-

esty, and the city people were glad to take the children to train as house servants; so when Benito was twelve years old he set out for Oaxaca, some forty miles away, and there he was taken into the house of a good, religious man, a bookbinder, who taught him reading, writing, arithmetic, and Spanish grammar, besides all the other things, such as good manners, which an ignorant little Indian boy would need to know. When he was fifteen he went to a church school where he was taught Medieval Latin, canon law, dogmatic theology and philosophy,—queer studies for a young boy, we should think now-a-days. His guardian, the bookbinder, must have grown to love him and believe in him, for he wanted to educate him to be a priest; but the boy chose to be a lawyer instead, and he received the degree of Bachelor of Laws, and later the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, from the University of Oaxaca. In 1834, when he was not yet twenty-eight years old, he was admitted to the Bar.

The story of Benito Juarez's life is too long

to tell here; but you can read it in Mexico's history, if you will. The little Indian boy became Governor of Oaxaca; he prepared and proclaimed a civil and criminal code for the State, "the first code of laws ever published in Mexico." He was exiled for political reasons in 1855, and lived for a while in New Orleans, where he used well his opportunity to study the political institutions of the United States. In 1859, the United States "recognized Juarez as the legitimate constitutional ruler of Mexico," and to-day he is revered in memory as a great President. In the midst of his presidency the French people set up another government in Mexico and made Maximilian, the Austrian, Emperor of the country; but the United States stood by Mexico in disapproving of this change, and in 1865, Juarez came into power again and put Maximilian to death. It may seem to us now a great pity that he should have done this, but he honestly thought he was right at the time.

We are told by Mr. Enock, who has written

a sketch of him, that Juarez had "A somewhat stoical temperament, a reserve in matters of public importance, coolness and self-possession in the face of danger, patient endurance of adversity, dignified courtesy at all times." Men called him "The President in the Black Coat," because in a day when diplomats and military men were fond of wearing their brilliant costumes and uniforms, he wore always the plain black clothes of the Mexican student or professional man. He died in 1872, but to-day his influence still lives in his unhappy country, for Carranza's promise to his countrymen and to the United States is that he will carry out the Reforms of Juarez, Mexico's greatest son.

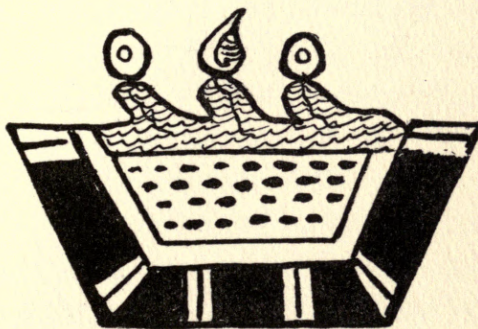
When you have read the story of Porfiria and Ramon you may want to know more of these Southern neighbors of ours. Their history, in the days when Cortés entered the land of the Aztecs and conquered their king, Moctezuma, is as strange and wild as the most unreal of romances; and their later struggles against their Spanish rulers are only less ex-

citing. This neighbor who has suffered so much from outside oppression and robbery, as well as from the men of her own household, needs our sympathy and our unselfish help. Shall we not try to understand her and really be neighborly?

Affectionately yours,

FLORENCE CONVERSE.

PART I  
THE VILLAGE





# THE VILLAGE SHIELD

## CHAPTER I

**M**Y earliest recollections have to do with the sound of rippling water, with the lapping lake on the shore of which our humble hamlet stood, and the tinkling rills that ran thereto down the center of each cobbled, tree-arched lane. The source of these rills was to be found on the slope above the village in two springs that gushed from beneath the roots of a gigantic fig tree. One hot and of a pleasing softness, the other cold as the Colima<sup>1</sup> snows, they formed our village's sole and sufficient wealth.

Thither, in the fresh dawn, herdsboys drove the goats to water on their way to upland pastures; there the maidens, climbing in single file through the dewy *milpa*,<sup>2</sup> filled their water

jars for household needs, and there at shallow tanks, daylong, the village mothers washed and talked. Many well-built sluices from this central source irrigated our cornfields, our patches of vegetables on the confines of the hamlet, and the tiny orchards embowering each home. The small domain, which thus girdled the village with pasture, tilth and shore, was common land, and was called the Village Shield.

Where the outer rim of our Shield rested on the blue expanse of lake, stood the cottage of my grandparents. Raised on piles, it was reached by a narrow causeway. Beneath it the glancing water was always in motion, always playing with shifting lights through open door and window, and even through the watted walls. The thatched roof was overshadowed by a trellised trumpet vine, and by the massive green of an ancient mango tree. This last comprised our orchard. At the door of the cottage in fair weather our fishing boat was moored.

There were only four of us, my grandfa-

ther and grandmother, my foster brother Ramon, and myself. Ramon was a good four years older than I, tall and strong for his age. Yet our christening day, as you will see, was the same.

It happened, early one morning, when my grandfather and Ramon were out as usual fishing for *pescados blancos*,<sup>3</sup> and my grandmother, water jar on shoulder, had gone to the springs, that I was awakened by a prolonged and unfamiliar buzzing among the flowers of the trumpet vine. The short, quick strokes of the humming-birds that frequented our arbor were different from this continuous, not to say excited, uproar. I sprang from my bed. A scattering cone of insects which centered their flight on a darker apex of struggling, black bodies, buzzed about the roof-tree. It was a swarm of bees.

Young as I was, perhaps in my seventh year, I was aware that we were very poor. Grandfather often shook his white head at the small catch of fish, and complained in a quavering

voice that the *pescados blancos* were not as plentiful as they used to be when he was young. And Grandmother sometimes sighed over the heavy pounding of cornmeal for *tortillas*.<sup>4</sup> Then Ramon and I would slip away to our tiny plot of peppers and beans, and weed and water the plants, wishing the while that we might suddenly grow bigger, so that we could help our dear grandparents more. This too was the burden of my prayer to the Virgin each night and morning as I knelt before her image in the gable of our hut.

The bees, therefore, appeared to me to be the Virgin's answer. I went quietly to work to make them mine. From within I brought Grandfather's coat and trousers of white *manta*<sup>5</sup> cloth, and laid them, as smoothly as I could, on the ground. Then, from one of our two *petates*,<sup>6</sup> I fashioned a rude skep.<sup>7</sup> It was not a hard task to climb the trellis, nor to cut the vine to which the mass of bees had clung. With a soft thud, they fell to the cloth below. For a few minutes the little creatures went

wild, but gradually they settled, reconnoitered, and, to my unspeakable joy, moved into their new home.

Grandmother must have found the gossip at the fountain more to her liking than usual that morning. The sun was near midheaven when at last she came in sight, hot and tired. I ran to meet her.

"Grandmother," I cried, "the Blessed Virgin has sent us a swarm of honey bees."

In our simple lives the rising and setting sun, the tasseling maize, the winds even that ruffled the lake, were events. How much more the unlooked for arrival of the bees!

Soon it was noised abroad in the whole village that Porfiria, the fisherman's daughter, had succeeded in hiving a swarm. "And such a swarm," continued the chief goatherd's wife, who had come with the rest to see them, "They are golden-banded and altogether larger than any I have ever seen."

"Are they bees, then?" asked Grandmother dubiously, when our neighbors had gone away.

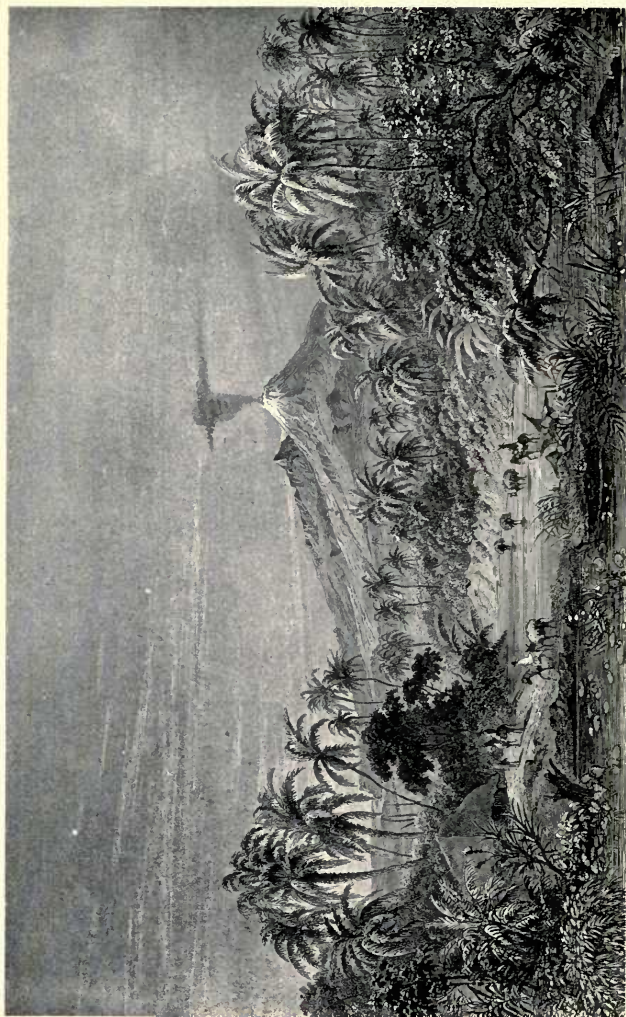
"Without doubt," answered Grandfather, who with Ramon had returned with the day's catch in the midst of the excitement. "But also they do not belong to us."

I listened incredulous. My mind flew with the swiftness of the bees to each possible owner, the *cacique*,<sup>8</sup> the goatherd, the muleteer, the charcoal burner, all those whose lives were bounded by the dun-colored hills or the silvery shore of the Shield.

"But they do, they do," I cried. "The good God gave them to me." Thereupon like a tempest came my tears.

Grandfather's arms were around me in a moment. "Child of my child, child of my heart," he crooned, rocking me softly until my sobbing ceased. "Listen, *pobrecita*,"<sup>9</sup> he said. presently. "All the world is not our little hamlet, nor the fields, nor the lake shore you know so well, though now alas! this is all of the world that this tribe of Tarascos<sup>10</sup> owns. The lake which by day holds its mirror to the mighty sun, and by night cherishes the stars;





COLIMA'S SMOKING PLUME

the palest blue mountain peaks of the horizon, fiery Colima yonder, whose smoky plume you see, east, west, north and south,—these were but a part of our fathers' vast empire."

The fires of his eyes, suddenly kindled like those of the volcano, went out as suddenly. "What I mean, little one, is this. Have you forgotten that over beyond the village lands, farther away than you can see, stretch those of Don Luis? He is a great and rich man, the son, from generation to generation, of our conquerors. In truth, it is only by the sufferance of his ancestors, who made a treaty with our fathers, that our free village remains. From his hives, methinks, these honey bees have strayed."

Silence fell upon us for a space, I pondering over the huge world thus thrust upon me, Grandfather wrapped in the past.

"Then, Grandfather," broke in Ramon, "if Don Luis is so rich, surely he will not begrudge Porfiria her bees, especially as she caught them."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. Who can say?" replied Grandfather. "To-morrow we will go and see."

But in fact it was several days later that Grandfather, Ramon and I set out for the *Casa Grande* <sup>11</sup> where Don Luis lived. Very early, by the light of the Day Star, we started. The pattering flocks of goats and the herdsboys kept us company till they found pasturage in the folds of the brown hills, where in spite of winter drouth, the short grass was still green. A shower the night before presaged the summer rains. The ground, made firm and dustless for walking, was grateful to our feet. The air came fresh and fragrant on the dawn wind. Sometimes we stopped to rest, sometimes Ramon carried me on his strong back. At length the sun rose, yellow as the masses of oranges which covered the trees on the hill-sides about us, and out of which it seemed to bloom. To me, who had never been so far afield, the world spread limitless.

To my eyes, it was a strangely ordered world

as well. Instead of growing in haphazard profusion as in our tiny orchards, orange groves gave place to bananas, and these in turn to limes. Ranks of pomegranates stood in scarlet flower. Even the *tuna*,<sup>12</sup> that wild fruit of the desert, was here set out in rows. Overlooking the whole vast orchard, which as my grandfather told me comprised only a section of Don Luis's estate, was the *Casa Grande*, a massive building with walls of blinding white.

We soon presented ourselves at the courtyard gate. There was much running to and fro within, and it seemed like a great while before we were admitted to the presence of Don Luis. But he, as I afterwards learned, was always punctilious in according audience to any one, even the humblest of his *peones*.<sup>13</sup> He was at breakfast when we were ushered in.

Now the *cacique* of our village was an old man with white hair. So were his councillors, men wise with years, like my grandfa-

ther, who was one of them. But Don Luis was young. The rich, all-powerful ruler of ten square leagues of land and a hundred villages, as I later knew him to be, was at this time barely twenty years of age. His youth, his engaging smile as he welcomed us, made nothing of our difference in rank.

Salutations over, Grandfather explained our errand, I holding fast to his hand the while. Would the judge consider me a culprit for stopping and seizing his bees? Under the gaze of Don Luis's keen eyes, I felt myself most miserable.

At the conclusion of the narrative, during which his expression had become more and more grave, he called me and Ramon to his side.

"My children," said he, placing a hand on each of our heads, "you love your grandparents?"

"Yes," we said in chorus.

"Honor them as well. Truth and honesty will be your heritage."

He turned to Grandfather. "To you, who have given up your day to this long journey, may your new-found bees make some return."

"May God reward you a thousandfold, Don Luis."

"God be with you." So ended the interview.



## CHAPTER II

**B**Y another summer, our bees had stored enough honey from the ever-blooming flowers to form a welcome addition to our fare. Grandmother spread our *tortillas* occasionally with the fragrant sweet, and what she saved she was able to exchange in a small way for our neighbor's produce. This was the more fortunate as Grandfather was becoming crippled by rheumatism, and could no longer compete with the younger fishermen. He and Ramon still supplied fish for our own needs, but for purposes of barter we had only our little store of honey and the fruit from our mango tree. Yet, although very poor, we managed to exist without calling upon our neighbors for assistance, and rude as Grandmother's household arrangements were, our little home was always trim and clean.

What with helping our grandparents in this

brave and never-ending struggle, Ramon and I had little time to play. Nor did we, in truth, see much of the other children of the village except as we met them at the springs or in the fields of the Shield.

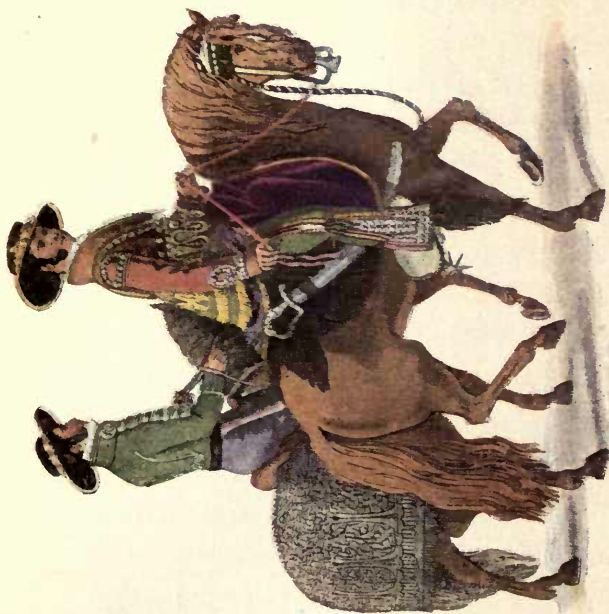
Our days ran as uneventfully as the tinkling rivulets until the second great event of my life, which had to do with the marriage of Don Luis and the opening of our church.

This church, which in my grandfather's boyhood had been the center of the village life, was closed and almost in ruins. Its two slender spires were still the landmark of the fishermen in sailing home across the lake. But the bells no longer rang out over the water, and even the door was fastened shut by the tendrils of a luxuriant vine.

*Fiesta*<sup>14</sup> days, such as that of Corpus Christi,<sup>15</sup> All Souls and Christmas, were still celebrated among us. At these times the village was half deserted, all who could, men, women and children, making a pilgrimage of many miles across mountains and through

steep *barrancas*<sup>16</sup> to the distant city of Lerma. They took with them on these occasions fresh vegetables, fruits, turkeys and cheeses as well as baskets and mats, to sell in the great fairs which they told us were held at the very doors of the cathedral. They brought back alas! very little, because most of their money was spent for drink, *mescal*,<sup>17</sup> *tequila*,<sup>18</sup> and *aguardiente*.<sup>19</sup> For days after their return from such expeditions, flaming torches, music, dancing and drunken revelry made hideous our usually placid shore.

On account of these *fiestas*, Grandfather told me, the *Casa Grande* no longer held with the Church. In the time of Don Luis's father a feud between two villages had culminated one Christmas day in a drunken massacre in the churches themselves. Old Don Felipe heard of this in Mexico City whither he had driven in great state for the holidays. On his return, hastened by this catastrophe, he banished from his domains the priests, whom he held responsible for the outbreak,



IN THE TIME OF DON FELIPE



with the exception of one who resided at the *Casa Grande* to minister to the needs of his own family. At the same time, he forbade the manufacture of or traffic in all liquor, and rode about in person directing the destruction of every *maguey*,<sup>20</sup> from which the worst of these fiery brandies are made. Thus it came about that in place of these terrible plants flourished the spreading orchards of which I have already spoken.

Though there were murmurings, of course, at Don Felipe's restrictions, the villages all flourished because of them. Ours, which had been sodden in poverty, became self-supporting under the Master's patriarchal care. What work he required from the villagers, he paid for justly; what produce they raised was now, without church tithes, their own, and since it was not squandered for drink, sufficed to keep them in comfort. At intervals the priest who ministered to the family at the *Casa Grande* came to give them the consolations of religion. For the rest, they were free to call upon Don

Felipe to share their joys and their sorrows. And when the old temptation to drink came too strongly upon them, he overlooked the shortcomings of those whom he regarded as children. To this beneficent rule had succeeded Don Luis.

Owing to his youth, and to the fact that he was in Paris, being educated, at the time of his father's death, the actual management of the *hacienda* <sup>21</sup> passed into the hands of an *administrador*.<sup>22</sup> Only recently had Don Luis himself taken charge, and he was as yet unmarried and without family ties. To this, my grandfather thought, was due the fact that no priest now lived at the *Casa Grande*. Within my memory, none had visited us.

There was, therefore, unusual excitement at the washing pools one morning, when Fructosa, the cheese-maker, on her way back from taking cheeses to the *Casa*, announced that the young master (as even we free villagers called him) had been married in Mexico City and was bringing home his bride.

"A city lady, then!"

"No indeed, from across the water; Habana, I think they call it."

"Not a *Mexicana*!"

"No, an Andalusian, they say,—though she is proud, too, of her Aztec blood; they say that a daughter of the Emperor Moctezuma<sup>23</sup> was one of her ancestors."

Question and reply followed swiftly, until Fructosa's small store of knowledge was exhausted. The Señorita was very rich, very beautiful, very pious, and very young. It was in this way that I first heard of our gracious Lady, whom God, in loving kindness, sent to us.

The few days remaining before the homecoming of the bridal couple the villages employed in making preparations for their welcome. To this end messengers passed from one *cacique* to another, allotting to each village its proper part in the celebration. As we were nearest the *Casa*, it fell to us to repair the road for a league beyond the gate. Other villages along the route took up the work where

we left it, and carried it to the confines of the estate. An arch of flowers hid the gateway of the mansion. In the kitchen the special delicacies of each locality were made ready for the feast.

At length a hard-riding courier, flecked with foam, galloped into the courtyard with the news that the bride and groom had alighted from the train, and were even then half way home. We of the villages poured forth to line the road. Foremost went the *caciques* and their councilors, Grandfather among them, their white shirts and trousers whiter than their hairs. Then came the younger men in new-washed suits and the women in clean chemises, their black hair braided with lilies. A laughing horde, we children followed with arms heaped high with flowers.

Down the road a whirl of dust resolved itself into a thundering coach. The driver's whip cracked in great swirls above the backs of six straining mules; the postilions shouted. At a signal from Ramon, who had constituted

himself our leader, we threw our garlands on the highway. Over them the coach rolled, and on into the courtyard. So Don Luis brought Doña Marina home.

Perhaps a month later, Grandmother and I, busy with our work, were startled by the sight of a strange boat coming close inshore along the lake. It contained three people, besides the rowers, who gesticulated freely as they scanned the water front. Presently the prow was turned, and the boat came alongside our tiny wharf. From it stepped Don Luis, Doña Marina, and an older gentleman in a flowing brown garb. My grandmother immediately knelt, pulling me down beside her, and the stranger, making the sign of the cross, placed a hand on our heads and spoke a few words I could not understand. Then with many bows of deference, Grandmother dusted off the seats beneath our arbor for the unexpected guests. Doña Marina looked about her with evident delight. There could have been nothing, from the rude bee-hive to the dried pep-

pers hanging in the gable, that escaped her glancing eyes. When she looked at me and smiled, I thought that even the Virgin was not so beautiful as she.

But the Priest—our sainted Padre Francisco, who was in truth to become a father to us fatherless waifs—called me to him.

"*Niñita*,<sup>24</sup> come and tell me, when is your name day," he said in his kindly voice.

"I have none, sir," I replied.

"But that is not possible; every one has a name day. How many years old are you?"

I dug my bare toes hard on the ground. "I do not know," I said.

"What, then, are you called?" he continued.

"Porfiria."<sup>25</sup>

"Porfiria," the Señorita, who had been following the conversation with interest, repeated. "It is a name that belongs fitly to autumn, the loveliest season of the year."

"You are right," said the Padre. "Her name-day would fall in this month."

Don Luis whispered to his wife, and the

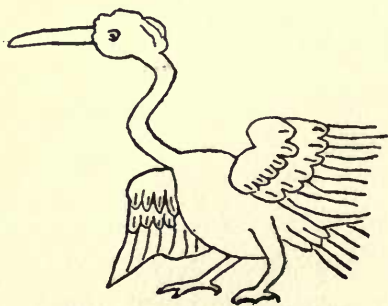
three rose to go. But when the Señorita held out her hand to me, I took it shyly and walked with them along the beach to the church.

From what I heard then, as they broke away the vines, turned the rusty key in the lock, and entered the bare building, I was not surprised at the word that flew about our little plaza that evening. "There will be mass next Sunday. All children should be brought and christened. Don Luis and Doña Marina will stand godfather and godmother to all."

That Saturday there was not a moment, from dawn to dusk, when the washing pools were free. Those who could not get to the hot tank used the cold. Clothes were washed and dried; the long black hair of our women was cleansed and combed, and in laughing be vies the children were stripped and bathed.

On Sunday, for the first time in our lives, Ramon and I went to church. The bells rang out joyously over the lake, and at last ceased their jangling; the worshipers, overflowing the church into the courtyard, knelt with up-

stretched arms. Within, the Bishop of Lerma, aided by Padre Francisco, intoned the mass. Afterwards, in groups of twenty-five or fifty, with the lighting of candles and the laying on of hands, the christening was performed. In some cases, so long was it since a priest had visited us, whole families received the rite together. As the cross was placed on my forehead and Padre Francisco baptized me, recording, as it were, my name in heaven, I looked up to Doña Marina. Beautiful, compassionate, like the Madonna, she looked down and blessed me. From that moment a profound emotion took possession of me. I worshiped her who stood thus the sponsor of my soul.



### CHAPTER III

**M**Y foster-brother Ramon was not of our village, a circumstance which I have always thought accounted for his dexterity in wood carving and joinery. We, as a village, possessing scanty woodlands, had small opportunity of acquiring such skill. Be that as it may, my grandfather told how my father had found Ramon, almost drowned, in a skiff on the lake after a storm, and had brought him home for my mother to add to her already large family. The smallpox which visited the village shortly afterward carried away all my family except my grandparents and myself. As a matter of course, my grandfather and grandmother made a home for both Ramon and me.

Ramon had, from their first arrival, taken a great interest in our bees. From the bee-

keeper at the *Casa Grande*, he learned all he could of their habits and proper care. Whatever time he had—which was very little, he spent in the apiary, noting how the empty boxes were prepared for the hives, and the full combs taken out. Whenever the bee-keeper allowed, he helped in the work. It naturally resulted that he looked with increasing disfavor on my poor *petate* skep. He determined to make a hive of wood ready for the season's swarm.

Many an evening, after the day's work was done, Grandfather, Grandmother and I sat and watched him fashion it from the packing boxes the kind-hearted bee-keeper had allowed him to use. He had no tools but a knife and a hatchet, but his clever fingers made the most of these.

"*Ay de mi!*"<sup>26</sup> Grandfather sometimes sighed, looking with admiration on the smoothed surfaces and the well doweled sides which the boy's patient labor produced, "would that I were a younger man, my son. Then I

could spare you to be taught a trade, and so you would not live to be a poor old fisherman like me!"

Ramon laughed, a bright, courageous laugh, as if, I thought, he could do anything. Then he wrapped Grandfather's worn *sarape*<sup>27</sup> closer to protect him from the night wind, and bent to kiss Grandmother on each cheek.

Our gloamings were brief, and there was little time between daylight and starlight for work. But the month of October that year was unusual in that Colima became suddenly active. By day heavy funnels of smoke curled upward above the horizon; by night the glow of her hidden furnaces turned them to pillars of fire. Used, as we were, to occasional eruptions, we did not feel much fear. Ramon called the fiery cone his torch, and worked late in the weird glow.

Yet a shimmering heat seemed to pervade the air, very different from the fresh clearness which by right belongs to this season. So pronounced was this one morning that it was

with an undefined foreboding that I set out with Ramon for the springs from which we were now old enough and strong enough to bring the water for the household, thus relieving dear Grandmother somewhat. I remember looking back as we went up the village street, to catch one more glimpse of our cottage, and of Grandmother in the doorway, before the trunk of the mango tree hid them from my sight.

As we filled our jars at the springs, the aspect of the day became more terrible. From here could be seen the actual belching forth from the volcano of the great clouds of smoke. The light of the sun spread over the heavens like a dome of brass. Beneath it, the earth seemed to melt with heat into a flaming lake. Terrified by the spectacle, Ramon and I turned to run back to the shore. The girls drawing water had the same impulse. "To the hills, to the hills," they cried, thinking to rouse the unconscious village to its danger. But their weak voices at best could not have reached its

outskirts; a horrible rumbling drowned them. "*El temblor,*<sup>28</sup> *el temblor,*" some one shrieked. Earth and sky heaved together and bereft us of consciousness.

When I came to myself again, Ramon still lay senseless beside me. I struggled to the edge of the spring and dipped in my jar to bring him water. But I drew it up empty. The springs were dry! Gradually Ramon returned to consciousness, and together we made our way to the village. The confusion there was terrible. We ran through the cluttered streets almost unseeing, our thoughts busy with what we would find on the shore. At length the top of the mango tree came into sight. A few steps more, and we would know whether the hut still stood. Ramon, who was in the lead, stopped suddenly, shading his eyes with his hand. The lake water lapped angrily at our very feet; as we looked, we could see the towers of the church and the tree-top rising above it. But the cottage had been engulfed.

By the time Don Luis and Padre Francisco

could reach our stricken village, the lake had receded, and the springs had resumed their flow. So sudden and so brief was our catastrophe. But to others besides Ramon and me it was also most complete. The evidences of it were on every side, trees cleft asunder, houses thrown down; women and children crying, and others dry-eyed, still looking up and down the lake for the fishermen who would never return.

Among all our neighbors, however, we were the most bereft, orphaned for a second time, and homeless. In spite of their own distress, they did not forget us, but tried to comfort us with food and shelter. Yet I can remember nothing clearly until Doña Marina came. It pleased her to be particularly touched by our misfortunes, so much so that she insisted upon riding down herself from the *hacienda*, and taking us home with her.

Ramon and I were both too dazed to wonder much at this temporary solution of our difficulties. Our gracious Señorita took entire

charge of us, and when bedtime came tucked us, with her own hands, into such beds as we had never dreamed of. Then softly she said the Pater Noster and many other prayers. The tones of her voice, her presence, which seemed to us to belong to that heaven to which our beloved grandparents had been snatched, soothed our sorrows. Listening, we fell asleep.

The following Sunday Padre Francisco performed mass for the souls of all those who had met with sudden death. As the church had been rendered unsafe, this service was held on the shore. There, within a stone's throw of the spot from which our grandparents had been swept away, Ramon and I listened to their requiem. The lake smiled and rippled at our feet, but it never gave up its dead. At the close of the mass, the *cacique* and others who had been our friends from generation to generation, as they put it, came up one by one to offer testimony to the simple goodness of my grandfather and grandmother. I began to understand what Don Luis meant on the day when Grandfather

first took us to the *Casa* to return the swarming bees. In truth, though penniless, we had a goodly heritage.

Life at the *Casa*, with its diverse interests, ere long dulled the loneliness of our hearts. Ramon was given regular work in the beeyard, and I too had my daily task, in the Señorita's flower garden, the weeding and watering of which became my care. In the cool of morning and evening she used often to sit or stroll there, sometimes calling me to her side, sometimes talking with the Padre as they paced the fragrant paths. Don Luis, always busy, always, as I remember him, on horseback galloping to the inspection of some part of the *hacienda*, was little at home. The management of the portion of his estate immediately surrounding the *Casa*, as even I could see, was left chiefly in the hands of his trusted *administrador*.

Grizzle-haired, keen-eyed, half Indian, half Spanish, Lucio Almonte seemed fitted by birth and experience for his position. Yet his smile



LA HACIENDA DE LOS PAJARITOS SANTOS



to me hid something sinister, like the smiling lake. I always pictured him as I became used to seeing him on the nights when the hands were paid off. The flare of candles fell on piles of silver coin heaped up on the deal table behind which he sat, leaving his face in shadow. One by one the white-clad workers, with their steeple hats in their hands, came forward from the long line in the courtyard, at his call.

"Anastasio!" The *vaquero*<sup>29</sup> stepped up.

"Five days you have worked, being drunk the day after the *fiesta* of San Juan. You also bought of me two mangoes. This leaves one *peso*<sup>30</sup> and ninety-five *centavos*<sup>31</sup> due you."

The money clinked into Anastasio's hand and he moved aside to count it. So through the long line the *administrador* went, never at fault for a name or a reckoning.

One morning in the Christmas holidays, when Don Luis and Doña Marina were absent in the city and the house seemed intolerably lonely, I followed Ramon into the apiary. The orange trees under which the hives were placed

were in flower. As I watched the tiny honey gatherers, and the bright-colored humming-birds which flitted with them about the fragrant trees, my mind went back to our home on the lake shore where bees and birds together used to hover about the trumpet vine.

"Ramon," said I suddenly, "do you remember the story the Padre told us yesterday about San Francisco and the blessed birds?"

"Yes," said Ramon. "He was explaining why Don Luis's ancestor named this estate the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos,<sup>32</sup> and why we must be kind to his birds."

"Yes," I persisted, "but did he not say the birds have souls?"

"I think so."

"Then why do not the bees, so intelligent, so industrious, also have souls?"

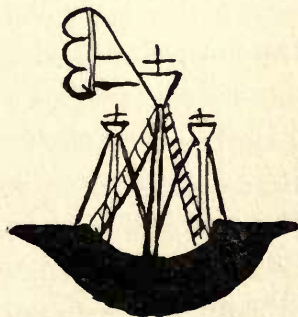
"Perhaps they may have, little sister, who knows?"

The next time Padre Francisco walked in the garden, I made bold to ask him.

He stopped abruptly. "Why do you ask, *niñita?*"

"Because of our poor bees who were drowned. They worked like us. Sometimes I think of them as a village like ours. And just as our workers came home from the fields and the pastures that day, so they too came home to find themselves homeless and their kindred dead."

Padre Francisco looked at me quite a long time in silence. "Of one thing, Porfiria, we may at least be sure," he replied at length, "that our Father, who made them, fulfills in them his purpose. And his purpose toward all his creatures is love."



## CHAPTER IV

AT the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos, as the days went by, it became increasingly easy to believe in a law of love. Love tempered with justice, perhaps, as personified in the strictness of Lucio Almonte, but love overflowing in compassion from the heart of Señorita Marina and bearing fruit in good works. It became more and more the habit of Padre Francisco to accompany Don Luis in his rides about the estate. In the evening, on the cool balcony or in the garden, his voice could be heard in earnest conversation intermingled with the voices of Doña Marina and Don Luis. Lola, the Señorita's Cuban maid, passing noiselessly about the house in her bare feet, brought reports of wonderful plans under discussion for the betterment of the villages, —teachers, schools, doctors and agricultural

improvements. All this for the benefit of the *peones*, who were Don Luis's property; as much his property as the oxen, the sheep, the horses and the vast lands he owned.

"But why?" questioned the cook. "For what purpose, for whose profit, is this to be done?"

Lola shrugged her shoulders. "The Padre says it is for the love of God; the Señorita says it is for the love of the people, and Don Luis—Name of God! how he loves her! He said last night he was willing to spend up to a million *pesos*. A million *pesos*, think of it, to please her!"

A beginning, indeed, of these improvements we could see in our own village, over which, in spite of its freedom, the *hacendado*<sup>38</sup> had always exercised a more or less kindly care. It was from Don Luis's coffers that the repairs to the church after the earthquake were made, and his endowment of it that defrayed the expenses of marriages, baptisms, and deaths. How great a benefaction this alone was, I only

came to know lately, in hearing of the many, many estates where my poor Indian kindred lived and died without these sacraments, simply for lack of the tithe that Holy Church requires. The rebuilding of the church was followed by the erection of an adobe schoolhouse adjoining it. The festivities of Easter, for which the Bishop of the diocese again came among us, culminated in the opening of this school. For the first time in the history of the village, its children were to be taught!

It had doubtless been the purpose of the Señorita, when she took us to the *Casa*, to return us ultimately to our natural place in the village. The school, the church, the stirring ambition of the hamlet, which already showed itself in doing away with cockfights, and in less frequent carousals, would have made her conscience easy on our account. But a most propitious event delayed the carrying out of this plan. In the early summer, her little son was born.

The rejoicing at the *Casa* was reflected in

the village, where an impromptu *fiesta* was held. To this Ramon and I, and such others of the household as could be spared, went down, carrying with us on *burros* <sup>34</sup> Don Luis's contribution to our merrymaking in the shape of a generous sack of tobacco and a cask of wine. A pretty sight greeted us as we wound down the hill. Around the edge of the plaza, in the shade of the pepper trees, the older folks and the children sat in an irregular circle, while the center was filled with dancers. The music of flute and violin reached us tantalizingly. Breathless with excitement, we joined the merriment.

The *cacique's* son led the men, the goat-herd's daughter the maidens. Backward and forward the two lines swayed to the music, now fast, now slow. Occasionally an old man leaned forward to prompt the leaders sharply, for this was the ancient dance of our people, handed down "from the time of the gods." With bows and gestures and the dovetailing of partners, the figures melted one into

another, till the rhythm was caught by the spectators, who swayed and clapped their hands. Suddenly each maiden broke over the head of her partner a colored egg, which she had concealed in her hand. A bright shower of confetti fell with the broken shells. Instantly the dance resolved itself into a general romp of flying egg shells and dodging heads.

The dance was succeeded by fire-crackers, and they, in the evening, by fireworks. These last the farrier and the carpenter had been months in devising, in anticipation of the great event. As an ornamental frame, bound in variegated tissue paper, their handiwork had already formed the pivot of the dance. A touch of the match transformed it. It became a pine tree, with needles of fire; it rained rockets; it suffused village and lake with lights like the breast of a humming-bird. For half an hour, without mischance, it was a dream of beauty. And when at last it flickered out, it gave place to an even lovelier and more lasting picture,—the church, illuminated with pitch

pine torches' from the ground to the apex of each tower. In some such way, in every village on Don Luis's land, the birth of the master's heir was hailed.

Several days later I was summoned by Lola, somewhat sourly, into the Señorita's chamber.

"Mind you that you step lightly and say nothing," she admonished me as she led the way, muttering all the while at the Señorita's strange fancy in sending for me.

The Señorita lay in ripples of rich lace and ribbons. Smiling, she drew aside the coverlet till I could see the soft dark hair and the long motionless lashes of the baby asleep against her arm. From that moment, the picture of my Madonna was complete. I knelt and kissed her hand.

Little Félix was happily named; a sunnier baby never lived. He soon took an immense delight in everything, with gurgles and shouts of joy. As he grew, his toddling feet carried him everywhere, into the garden among the flowers, into the kitchen, and into the court-

yard, where he was in real danger of being trampled by restless horses and mules. Lola was his nurse, but he seemed to have no great attachment for her. To his mind, perhaps, she constituted an authority from which he took every opportunity of running away. With me, on the contrary, he spent hour after hour, or rode about the bee-yard on Ramon's shoulder, as gracious a little tyrant as ever owned two very willing slaves. Those were perfect days; we had found our place in the world and there seemed no more thought of returning us to the village. Don Luis and Doña Marina looked with approval on our devotion. But Lola showed her jealousy in many spiteful ways.

Out of her spite grew my separation from my beloved brother Ramon. It was not to be supposed that his work in the apiary would wean him away from his passion for whittling anything in the shape of wood on which he could lay his hands. The making of flutes and

shepherds' pipes interested him more than the making of hives; and the bee-keeper, who came from our village, humored him in his bent.

One morning, instead of going the rounds of the hives, Ramon yielded to the sudden temptation of carving a wooden doll for the little master, with which to surprise him when he should appear. I heard him stirring at dawn, and hurried into my clothes to join him. He worked with quick, sure strokes, and I, who entered with zest into the plan, sat beside him and sewed on the tiny *pantalones*<sup>35</sup> and jacket which were to adorn our *caballero*<sup>36</sup> when done.

We were startled by Lola's voice. "See for yourself; there they are, the shameless ones."

The *administrador* was behind her. "This is what comes of spoiling the peasants," said he angrily. "And now who do you suppose, my fine gentleman, is going to pay for the three hives of Don Luis's bees that have swarmed

this morning—gone—pouf—like that.” He puffed out his ugly lips and made an airy gesture toward the lake.

Ramon was dumbfounded. “But it is yet early,” he protested. “I worked while I waited for the bell.”

“Early—bell,” repeated Señor Almonte, in concentrated scorn. “The sun dial stands at eleven. Liar!” And with that he haled Ramon away. A few minutes later he jangled across the courtyard with a bunch of heavy keys.

Ramon had been put in prison. I could hardly believe such a thing possible, nor understand why I, equally guilty, was still at large. I looked all about the flower garden, in which we had been sitting, but saw no trace of Lola, our accuser. In fact, when I did meet her later in the day, she seemed quite as usual, neither more nor less disagreeable. I gathered up the poor doll and Ramon’s knife and the scraps of cotton cloth which I had been sewing, and hid them in my room.

Naturally, nothing went well with me that day. Don Luis, Doña Marina and the Padre were all away. Lola kept Félix with her on the balcony. From the garden, where I uprooted as many flowers as weeds, I could hear him fretting, calling, now for 'Firia, and now for his Ramon. Once I heard Lola slap him. The sound of his crying made me sick.

At length Lola became alarmed and came to get me. But by that time, Félix had worried himself into a fever, and could not be quieted. He wrung my heart with his pitiful pleadings for Ramon. Ramon knew where the water was cold, and Ramon would play for him. Where was Ramon?

Such was the state of affairs when Doña Marina came home. Attracted by the unusual crying of the child, she ran directly upstairs.

"Félix, Lola, what is the matter?"

Félix stretched out his arms, and she gathered him quickly to her.

"Tell me, Lola, what is it? The child is

sick." She passed her hand over his hot head and felt his uneven pulse.

"Of course he is sick," Lola flung back. "What can you expect when you trust him to such children? I found Porfiria here feeding him with unripe grapes. That's what is the matter." And she flounced out of the room.

The impudence of Lola's manner, as well as her speech, must have been lost on Doña Marina, who in truth was well-nigh distracted. She turned on me a look that struck me dumb. I could neither have denied nor affirmed anything; like a trapped thing, I in turn looked at her.

Then from a far-off place, I heard Don Luis's voice. "Tell me, Porfiria, is that true?"

Something in the quality of his tone, quiet and reasonable, seemed to unlock my gaze. I raised my eyes to his. "It is not true," I said.

By this time Félix had resumed his moaning, repeating over and over again the name of Ramon.

"Can you answer me very quietly, child?" continued Don Luis. "Where is Ramon?"

I could be quiet; my misery was too deep for tears. "He is in prison," I said.

"In prison! Why?"

So the whole wretched story came out.

When I had finished, Don Luis left the room without a word. But in a few minutes he reappeared, and with him came Ramon.

After supper, while Félix was being hushed to sleep with the crooning lullabies that Ramon loved to sing, Don Luis asked me to fetch the doll. He and Doña Marina had a friend with them in the *sala*,<sup>37</sup> besides the Padre, a stranger from the city of Lerma, I understood. This gentleman took a particularly keen interest in Ramon's carving.

"Is this the boy's first work?" he asked.

"Oh, no," I answered. "He makes beehives."

"Nothing else?"

"Flutes," I said hesitantly, remembering of

a sudden that Ramon had sworn me to secrecy on this point, “. . . and shepherds’ pipes.”

“Bring them.”

One after another, the stranger tried them, noting by the carefully inserted plugs, how the errors in scale had been corrected. The mellow wood notes rang out through the room.

Presently he laid them all down with a bang on the table. “*Por Dios*,<sup>38</sup> that boy is a genius. Hives indeed! Don Luis, you must give the lad to me.”

Then it transpired that the stranger was a maker of music, and of musical instruments as well. He wished to take Ramon and teach him the secrets of that master-craft. Ramon was summoned, looking, I thought, very straightforward and handsome as he modestly answered Don Luis’s questions. It was quickly arranged that he should accompany Señor Perez to Lerma on the latter’s return from the hunting trip on which he was then bound.

Ramon was in heaven with happiness. But I—after the many surprises of the day, it was impossible for me to feel more.



## CHAPTER V

**L**OLA'S spite perpetuated itself not alone in Ramon's good fortune, but in another change, equally momentous for me. She was dismissed and I became little Félix's nurse in her stead. It was only the sweet care of him, I think, that kept me from dying of grief after Ramon went away. Félix was then two years old, that most charming age of childhood when a baby's heart wakes to conscious love, and his little hands cling like delicate tendrils about their chosen support. So Félix clung to me.

My relations with the family in this way became much more intimate. Félix would scarcely let me out of his sight. Though his affections went out to everybody, I was his little mother and his playmate as well. I had a double incentive then to make the most of the opportunity for improvement given to me.

Each morning, as Félix's sweet prattle woke me, and each night as he said his little prayers, I prayed also to be made worthy of him and of Ramon.

The Padre took a great interest in me from this time on, instructing me in many things. Every day at Félix's nap time I had my lessons with him. Thus I learned to read and write and count. I became proficient in the lives of the Saints, and in the doctrines of Holy Church. In secular history also I was instructed, particularly in that which immediately affected our unhappy country. For in Padre Francisco's unworldly eyes, our country was equally unhappy whether under the rule of the Spanish *vireyes*<sup>39</sup> who for over four hundred years enriched themselves and the mother country at our expense, or under the latest so-called republican government of our President, Porfirio Diaz.

"Look you," said he, "even in this favored Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos, at the condition of your kindred. Do they, who used

to own the soil, reap what they sow? Churches they have, and schools, and a kind overlord in Don Luis. But when you are older and have seen, as I have, the terrible abuses on other *haciendas*, the pitiful wages, the uncared for ignorance, the stores of the *hacendados* where the wretched *peones* are actually encouraged to spend what little they have for *pulque*<sup>40</sup> and worse,—then you will see that the *system* is wrong. The good will of a hundred like Don Luis—and alas, I know of none other—can never make it right. It is a system of privilege, the enslaving of a nation for the enriching of its alien conquerors.

“It matters not whether these conquerors were the Spaniards who first seized your lands, or the latest American, English or German investors whose money, they say, has built the railways, the mighty power works, and the mills which are developing the country. Developing it for whom? You, or themselves? I tell you it is you, *peones*, burden-bearers, serfs, who have paid for your develop-

ment with the sweat of agony, and with your immortal souls.

"The remedy," Padre Francisco continued more quietly, "lies in your own hands. More than a hundred years ago, the sainted priest Hidalgo voiced it at Dolores among his poor parishioners. The bells had rung for mass, and by the light of candles the *peones* were assembled in the church. But Padre Hidalgo did not celebrate mass that morning. The words he spoke from the altar instead have been the battle cry of your liberties in the almost continuous warfares of four generations. Their inspiration, as ever, came from the oppression of the poor.

"'My children,' said Padre Hidalgo to his kneeling Indians, 'this day comes to us a new dispensation. Are you ready to receive it? Will you be free? Will you make the effort to recover the lands stolen from your fathers three hundred years ago?'

"In these words the patriot-priest voiced the *Grito de Dolores*; in truth a cry of sorrows,

which echoed, and still echoes, through the land.

“Hidalgo led his untrained peasants from victory to victory, only to become at last a fugitive and to die a traitor’s death. Many, some false prophets and some true, have followed in his footsteps, each to his untimely end. But at least one enormous evil their blood has washed away; the Church, which should have been your savior, no longer corrupts in the high places nor battens in luxurious livings on your miseries and shames. Over fifty years have passed since it was disestablished, and its holdings confiscated by the State. True, its disestablishment, which should have gone to enrich your people, has enriched only the Government that in the name of liberty continues to oppress you. But, mark well my words, Porfiria, this Government, which seems so firmly established, it also will fall.”

It is not to be supposed that I understood all that Padre Francisco said. Indeed at times

he talked more to himself than to me, as if he found relief for his pent up convictions in words as well as in deeds. But the fire of his eloquence stirred to life those more ancient fires in my blood which my grandfather had fostered in his lifetime. They gave me a conception of patriotism which extended beyond our village, beyond our tribe, to embrace all the downtrodden Indian races in one vast brotherhood. Alas! had our forefathers felt this kinship, the Spaniards would never have conquered us! It was a bitter lesson to learn from Padre Francisco that Hernando Cortés, the *Conquistador*,<sup>41</sup> made use of the hatred of one tribe against another, so that we ourselves became the tools of our destruction. Only in this way, by our help, were his victories won, and the mighty empires of Moctezuma and his allies given to the King of Spain. And it was a bitterer lesson to learn also that the same spirit of dissension, of self interest, and provincialism had betrayed us again and again into the hands of now this *conquistador* and now

that in the political wars of the last hundred years.

Porfirio Diaz, our latest ruler, had been, like most of the others, the hope of the Indians. Himself one of the common people, Indian blood ran in his veins. He promised fairly, and he had already in the thirty years of his power raised Mexico from bankruptcy to a place of honor among the nations, but he left his brothers still landless, ignorant and abused. Now in his old age, it was said that his councilors, hoodwinking him, sought only to enrich themselves. Year after year, the empty form of a popular election returned them, and him, to power. His political opponents were banished or perchance killed, or, as had happened to a certain Señor Madero who had tried to stand for election recently, thrust into jail. Darker charges than these were whispered against our President, even in our remote *hacienda*; charges which I lived to see cruelly verified.

Still, as Padre Francisco himself pointed

out, peace in itself was a great boon; and peace President Diaz had maintained with the strong help of the army and of his mounted police. Where the rights of the *peones* to decent living were respected as on our *hacienda* under Don Luis, happiness was added to peace. With Padre Francisco going from village to village, carrying out the Rules of his Order to succor the poor,—oh, how different from those of some other Orders professing to follow Our Lord!—the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos seemed an earthly paradise.

Into this paradise the serpent entered. Señor Almonte, the *administrador*, was in the habit of going with more or less frequency to the city of Lerma, on business connected with the marketing of Don Luis's crops. In this way, though to be sure very grudgingly, he enabled us to keep in touch with Ramon. He was, in fact, Don Luis's most constant avenue of communication with the outside world. Often he brought back with him, from the city, guests of his own who were never seen in

the Master's *sala*. For the *administrador*, brief of speech by nature, softened under the genial influence of wine, and, I have reason to believe, was very popular in his own particular set. On one occasion, I could have sworn that I saw Lola emerging with the other visitors from his quarters, but the glimpse I had of her was very brief, and I dismissed the matter from my mind.

The visitor I have most cause to remember came in the spring of 1911. The *tuna* crop that year was very heavy, and owing to its perishable nature, and to the fact that the wild cacti also had brought forth with unusual abundance, the *administrador* had difficulty in disposing of it to his satisfaction. The stranger, who gave himself out to be a manufacturer of a refreshing drink made of this fruit, came to bid in the entire yield. His errand gave him access to all corners of the *hacienda*.

Félix was by this time four years old, and I twelve. The Señorita's confidence in me, and

the tranquillity of the estate, made it possible for me to take him with me on little expeditions away from the *Casa*. On the particular morning I have in mind, we had gone to the village springs. There, with watching the coming and going of women and children, talking with them, and receiving the little attentions they bestowed on him, Félix was endlessly amused. Tired out at last, he had just fallen asleep in my lap when I noticed the *administrador* and the stranger coming through the corn fields. They were talking together very earnestly, the stranger pausing frequently to emphasize what he had to say with pointings and gestures in our direction.

“What are they doing here?” I thought as they approached. “*We* have no *tuna*-pears for sale.”

“Here they are,” I heard the *administrador* say, as they paused under the shade of the fig tree. “Ah, good morning, how are you, Señorita Molina?” to one of the village matrons all aflutter with such a salutation.

"Yes, a cup of water, if you please; we are very thirsty. Hot work, this walking. A thousand thanks for your trouble!"

That was another suspicious circumstance; they were walking, instead of riding as usual.

The stranger completed the circuit of the two springs, expressing his views, whatever they were, in short grunts and the squinting together of heavy eyebrows over small, pig-like eyes. He made no pretense of drinking beyond tasting both the hot spring and the cold, and then spat the water out on the ground.

"*Que hombre!*" <sup>42</sup> I almost said aloud, but checked myself, and kept my head well down, hiding my own face and Félix as best I could.

"What a fool!" the stranger muttered at length, advancing nearer and taking in the nestling village, the shore, and the lake in a rapid sweep of the eyes. "And you, too, Almonte, are a fool for not seeing to this before. However, the hare's loss is the hound's gain,—though of course we will pull

it off together, as you say. This site is magnificent; couldn't be better; a hotel . . ."

"*Cuidado!*" <sup>43</sup> interrupted the *administrador*, laying a hand upon his friend's arm. "You forget; these Indians of Don Luis's are educated Indians, not like those on your estate. They understand altogether too much." His laugh was not pleasant to hear. Suddenly I saw beneath it the abysses that I had always feared in his smiles, treacherous like those of the smiling lake.



## CHAPTER VI

THAT night, after I put little Félix to bed, I slipped down into the garden. In that quiet, fragrant spot troubles and worries had a way of growing lighter. The moon was full, and I strolled slowly along the flowery terraces, watching its broad rippling path across the lake. Suddenly a sheet of flame flared from the cone of Colima,—a red and angry glare that colored even the radiant moonlight. My thoughts were like it, troubling the peaceful scene around me. I determined to go to Padre Francisco and lay my suspicions before him.

I found him in the *sala* with the Señorita and Don Luis, Don Luis smoking, the Señorita idly pulling a rose to pieces, and both listening to him. He paced the room as he talked.

“No, no, I tell you you are wrong, Señor,” he was saying. “This agitation of Madero’s

is of a different color from those President Diaz has been in the habit of putting aside so lightly. In the first place, Madero is working *à boca llena*; <sup>44</sup> a bad sign for the President and a good one for the people. He is no military revolutionist, but one who sought the Presidency in accordance with the Constitution, by peaceful votes. You will find that the people themselves are being aroused by this man."

Don Luis blew the ashes from his cigarette. "The old story, I presume; land for the landless. And his family are the owners of an entire state!"

"But you must remember that the *peones* are not reasoning creatures, *mi amigo*.<sup>45</sup> Last year I myself heard him address a street crowd in Lerma. What pleased the audience even more than the promise of lands, were he elected to the Presidency, was his equally impassioned promise that they should exchange their laborers' trousers for the gentlemen's *pantalones*. That was something concrete,

within the range of their experience. The cheering would have been absurd,—if it had not been so pitiful.”

“What the Padre says is certainly true to this extent, Luis,” broke in Doña Marina, “that Madero has had the courage to head the first political party in opposition to President Diaz at the polls. All the other agitators I can remember have tried to seize the Government by force.”

“That is true. And it would certainly have been an interesting experiment had Diaz allowed the election to be held, instead of throwing Madero into jail. I admit that.”

“Not only interesting, but essential, in the awakened state of the country. The President is too old a man to realize that the method of sham elections by which he has remained in power these thirty years will no longer suffice. But what have we here?” The Padre noticed my presence for the first time, and broke off abruptly.

“Félix, is he ill?” questioned the Señorita,

noticing, I suppose, the anxiety I could not conceal.

"No, Señorita, do not agitate yourself. He is well. But, with your permission, I feel that I should tell you of something that came to my notice to-day. It may be nothing,—that is for you to judge." Briefly then I related what had happened at the springs.

"Do you know this man, this manufacturer, Father?" Don Luis asked when I had finished.

"Well, I should judge from the description," the Padre answered briefly. "And so should you."

The two men exchanged a long, silent glance, seeming to understand each other without further words.

Don Luis stepped to the door and clapped his hands. A *mozo* <sup>46</sup> came running in answer to the summons, his bare feet echoing on the tiled corridor long before he himself appeared.

"Tell the *administrador* I wish to see him."

When Señor Almonte came, it was evident that he had been drinking; the flushed face,

insolent smile, and unsteady gait told the story all too well.

“At your feet, Señorita,” said he, saluting Doña Marina’s hand with a resounding kiss. “Your servant, gentlemen. *Con permiso.*”<sup>47</sup> He drew up a chair noisily and sat down.

Don Luis looked at him in disgust and amazement. He had never seen the *administrador* in this condition before. Doña Marina half rose to leave the room, but evidently thought better of it, and remained, standing beside Don Luis.

“Almonte,” Don Luis regarded the culprit steadily, “I had better tell you at once that you and your friend were both seen and heard to-day at the springs.”

“Oho, so; then that she-fox has been around again.” His eyes glared sidelong at me.

“Have a care!” exclaimed Don Luis, “or by Heaven— Who is this friend of yours?”

The words struck the fuddled brain of the *administrador* like a thunder-clap. “He is the *jefe político!*”<sup>48</sup>

"I thought as much. Now, what is your game?"

"Game, game?" repeated the *administrador* stupidly. "I do not understand."

"Perhaps I can help you then. As my trusted overseer, and my father's before me, you are well acquainted with the legal status of the Village of the Shield. You know, in fact, that these villagers have no legal status, holding their lands simply by an ancient treaty with my ancestors, which is in truth covered by our Constitution, but is not covered by our laws."

"Pardon me, you are wrong there." The course of reasoning outlined by Don Luis probably recalled that of the *jefe* in urging his evil scheme, thus producing the reaction on which Don Luis had counted. "They are covered, well covered. All unrecorded lands belong, by that very fact, to the State. *Caramba!*<sup>49</sup> What have you to say to that?" He leered up into his master's face.

"I see, it is as I thought." Don Luis, ignor-

ing the drunken fool, spoke to the Padre. "And the State is here represented by its collector of taxes, its scavenger, its spy, the *jefe político*. As to you," he turned to the *administrador*, "you may go. In the morning, if you are sober, I may have somewhat more to say."

The bleared eyes of the *administrador* followed, against their will, the hand that pointed to the door. He rose and stumbled from the room.

Don Luis knew that night that he was a ruined man; ruined, that is, unless he connived at the ruin of his defenseless villagers. Such a thought, I feel sure, never crossed his mind. There was no recourse in law; in truth, there never had been.<sup>50</sup> To have recorded the village lands earlier, as required by law, would only have brought them the sooner to the attention of the *jefe* who, here, as in every district in Mexico, was the direct representative of the Federal Government and responsible only to it. Not even the powerful protection of Don

Luis could have saved them from the speculator's greed. Nor could he follow his impulse to buy off the bargainers. The lands, he had no doubt, were already recorded by the *jefe* in the name of the Government. A private citizen, setting himself against such a Government, takes the wall.

His surmise was correct. In the morning the *administrador* could not be found. He had gone to join his accomplices in the city. The Village Shield was doomed. Yet the menace which hung over us was not immediate, in the judgment of Don Luis and the Padre. The dictatorship of President Diaz, as they knew, was tottering to its fall. Already Madero, escaping from prison, was rallying an army in the North, and the Federal troops were being rushed to meet the rebel force. If the *jefe's* hands were kept sufficiently full, he would not strike yet. And if not soon, he might no longer have the power to harm us. The fate of the Shield thus hung upon that of the country.

Ugly rumors began to be bruited abroad. There were uprisings to the west and to the south. Bandits, unleashed by Diaz's slackened power, infested the mountains once more, and came down to terrorize unprotected farms and traveling merchants. Men were killed for their gold, and women carried away. We heard of trains that were stalled and sacked, and even wrecked with no regard for the lives of the passengers. Yet, so far, Lerma and its vicinity had escaped violence, and I had from time to time the great joy of hearing that Ramon also was safe.

We of the *Casa Grande*, however, kept closely within its boundaries. As the revolution increased in violence, Don Luis and the Padre had many an anxious conference. At one time, it was almost decided between them that Doña Marina should be sent with Félix to her home in Cuba, until the country should become safe again. But to this she would not hear, saying that where Don Luis was, was her only home, and that in spite of her foreign

birth, Mexico was her country. This, of course, was literally true, since through the Dukes of Monteleone, she traced her lineage back to Moctezuma, our Emperor; and I have always believed that it was because of her feeling of kinship, as well as because of her gracious character, that she took such an interest in us Indians. The reward of her piety came to her now in the loyalty and devotion manifest everywhere on the estate.

Nowhere was this more true than in the Village of the Shield. Don Luis had thought best to call together the councilors of the village and acquaint them with the menace to their property, and of the impossibility of any appeal save through arms. He explained from time to time, at various places on the estate, the course of the revolution, hoping thus to forestall agitation by hired agents of this faction or that, whose business it was to recruit the armies with discontented *peones*. He went so far as to issue a manifesto of his own, in which he counseled his laborers to keep

out of the conflict and to attend to their duties, promising that in return he would abide by the decision of the Revolution, even if it should mean the portioning out of his estate. By this means, and also through the faithful teachers in his schools, a fairly intelligent public opinion was created in favor of peace.

Thus, for two months, the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos, like the vortex of a whirlwind, remained calm. President Diaz fled the country, and the Revolutionists took over the Government. We all breathed easier for the news. In our tiny corner of the Republic, it seemed to mean that the Shield was safe. If it meant also that Don Luis would be forced to knock down his heritage, as it were, to his Indian serfs, he could at least retire with honor, and even with wealth, to Cuba. The outlook in the *sala* was cheerful and the *hacienda* thrived.

Then, from a totally unexpected quarter, the blow fell. It was on Christmas morning, and the villagers, as usual, were preparing to go

to mass. I had risen, without waking Félix, and slipped down to the village in the early dawn. There it was the custom of our women to keep vigil with the Holy Virgin. We had lighted our candles and begun the processional, whose cadences of "*Madre mia*,<sup>51</sup> *Madre mia*," ring even now in my ears, when a most horrible commotion broke forth. It came from the lake, shrouded in mist, and from the shore, and was caught up by yet other shouts and cries in the direction of the *Casa Grande*.

"The bandits!<sup>52</sup> Run for your life!" I heard in a prolonged answering shriek. Crushing my candle out against my dress, I did run, as fast as I could, to the *Casa*. The lake mist served to hide me, and the route I took by instinct, up the bottom of a little ravine, was less used than that through the cornfields. My one idea was to save Félix. But it was a full league to the house, and the stones of the dry stream-bed were very rough to my feet. When I arrived at the walls of the *Casa*, I knew that I was too late.

No one molested me as I entered a postern-gate and stole through the vineyard. In fact, in the whole course of the foray, I saw only one of the outlaws. Dead silence had settled over the place. I passed through the garden, where the Virgin's Mantles<sup>53</sup> were just opening to the sun, and on into the house. But why should I revive the horrors that I found there, the evidences of violence and desperate resistance? Enough to say that the house was deserted, and Félix's little crib empty, though still warm with the imprint of his body. He was gone, who only a few moments before had been there, safe and well. Nowhere did I find a single servant or come across a corpse that might give some clew to the mysterious disappearance of the family. Whoever the bandits were, they had been in sufficient force to take their dead and wounded with them. To aid them in their flight, they had levied the Master's horses; not one was left.

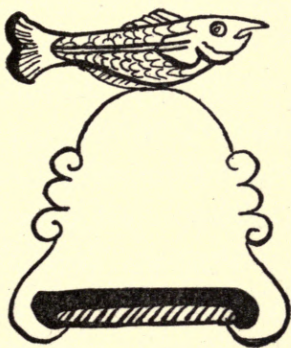
I went out on the balcony and scoured the country with my eyes. To the north, a spiral

of dust traveling swiftly along the road to Lerma, showed the bandits' trail. But my eye was caught away from this by a nearer evidence of their presence. The village, and even the fields about it, were in flames! Nor were the butchers through with their bloody work there, as shrieks and the sound of pistol shots borne up to me by the wind, bore witness. At that terrible spectacle, the horror of the whole catastrophe broke over me. I ran, I know not how, nor whither, until I lost consciousness.





PART II  
LEY FUGA





## CHAPTER VII

THE cool dews of night must have revived me. I woke at length to hear the familiar lapping of the lake on the shore. But as I sat up and looked about me, I saw that it was a part of the shore with which I was entirely unfamiliar. No lights shone from any habitation; even the stars seemed hostile, gleaming like daggers in the breast of the dark waters. I lay chilled, hungry and utterly desolate, until dawn. Something in the stir of the dawn wind woke me once more to life.

Like a panorama, the events of the day before passed through my mind. There must have been two attacking parties, I decided, one from the shore and one from the lake. Their motive at the *hacienda* was probably robbery, and they had carried off their victims to extract money by torture. I shuddered as I

thought of the terrible tales of just such forays to which I had so often listened of late. But why had they taken the time and the pains to visit their wrath on my poor and peaceful village? Suddenly the face of the one bandit I had seen again confronted me; the bleared eyes, the snarling mouth, the grizzled hair. As plainly as if he stood there before me, I saw Lucio Almonte, the *administrador*.

This, then, explained the mystery of the well planned attacks. How neatly, with no blame attached, the Village Shield had fallen into his hands! By the time the Government took cognizance of the outrages, if it ever did, what evidence would there be to connect him or his friend, the *jefe*, with the matter? In the unsettled state of the country, the attacks might be laid to any one of a half dozen mountain cutthroats,—or even to the straggling armies of the Government itself.

This theory of the *administrador's* complicity in our destruction, though modified by later events to include a darker villainy, served

to quicken me to action. The robbers of the *hacienda* had gone to Lerma; to Lerma I also would go, and find out through Ramon, if possible, the fate of my mistress and master, and of my little darling, Félix. His baby hands I saw continually stretched to me in supplication, and his moans reached across the mountains to echo in my heart. But first I determined to revisit the village. Some there might be, wounded or dying, in need of succor.

By this time I was faint with hunger and thirst. The margin of the lake here was swampy, and as I made my way down to the water, snakes uncoiled themselves from the low-growing bushes, and dropped beside my feet. With only a hasty drink, I was glad to regain firmer ground. A clump of trees draped in vines, on which a countless number of birds were feeding, gave me hope that I too might find a breakfast there. I was not disappointed; the vines still held clusters of wild grapes, overripe, but deliciously cooling to my parched throat.

From the vantage of the trees, I was able to get my bearings better, and all day followed on the higher ground the curving shore of the lake. By nightfall, I had reached the vicinity of the village once more. Here I hid until I could determine whether any of the robbers were still about. All was silent; there was no light. The quickly burning fires of yesterday had left no taint of smoke in the air. As I watched the dimly seen shore, and the two church towers that still outlined themselves in white against the lake, I could have fancied my village was only sleeping, and not dead.

Cautiously I descended, past the springs, through the burned *milpa*, and into the ruins. I had only the light of the stars to guide me, and in this way was spared part of the horror which must otherwise have overwhelmed me. Those whom I found were dead and unrecognizable in the dim light, and were mostly men and children. The women, where were they? "Mary, Mother," I found myself repeating, "have mercy on them." So I came to the gap-

ing doors of the church. A light still burned there, before the Virgin's shrine. Beneath it, I saw the blurred outline of a body. I felt it. The heart beat faintly! It was the first living thing I had found in all my search. Without considering whether it were friend or foe, I turned the face to the light. What was my thankfulness to discover Padre Francisco, sore wounded, doubtless, but still alive!

There must be no time lost if he—and I—were to be saved; at any moment the lurking bandits might return. I had hoped, as I skirted the hills on my way back, that I might find some boat at the village which the brigands had overlooked. An old fishing boat, hidden in a clump of willow trees where Carlos, its owner, was in the habit of mooring it, not more than twenty *varas*<sup>54</sup> down the beach, rewarded my search. It was already equipped, as our fishing boats always were, with a brazier, a supply of charcoal, *jarros*,<sup>55</sup> and a small quantity of provisions, besides the fishing nets. Back of the mast, a thatched cover made a tiny

cabin, and it was my plan to place Padre Francisco there.

By tying together some half charred bamboos, I made a rude litter on which I dragged him down to the beach and at last got him on board. I cast off, poled until I caught the off-shore breeze, and hoisted the lateen sail. As our boat began to move more swiftly through the water, the ripples beneath the prow were indeed a grateful sound to me. Lashing the stern oar in place, I gave my attention to the poor Padre. There was not much I could do for him until daylight, for I dared not strike a match. But I disposed him as comfortably as I could under the little thatched roof, and moistened his head and lips with water. With this and with the shifting of the rudder oar to keep our course down the lake, I was busy until dawn; but not too busy to think with concern on my circumstances, and to wonder what I should do were the Padre to die.

Daylight found us well out from either shore. I hauled down the sail, and made a

fire on the brazier. With warm water I washed the ugly *machete*<sup>56</sup> wound on the Padre's shoulder, and bound it up as well as I could. Then I made corn gruel and poured it between his lips. His torpor continued, only an occasional moan showing me that he still lived. All day we drifted, one of perhaps half a dozen boats on the broad lake, exciting no suspicion from them or from the shores. At night I again hoisted the sail, and we sped away.

The following morning, when I awakened, the Padre's eyes were open, and he knew me. From that time on, he mended steadily. His weakness, oh, how fortunately for us both! had come chiefly through loss of blood and the nervous shock of his heavy fall when he was struck down. As he grew better, I told him bit by bit what had happened, and what my plan was in going to Lerma. The necessity for hastening his recovery, instead of agitating him, served as a tonic. Two weeks later found us nearing the end of our strange cruise in the upper reaches of the lake, from which a

mountainous, but comparatively short, trail, known to Padre Francisco, led to the city of Lerma.

In a thicket, similar to the one in which I had found it, we moored our boat, and set forth on our march. Our provisions were now of the scantiest,—only a bundle of dried fish, and an *olla* <sup>57</sup> of water which I carried on my head. Naturally, our progress was slow, the Padre suffering greatly from his wound, and I always on the lookout to avoid the charcoal burners and the herdmen's huts which we occasionally saw. Had it not been for the Padre's cassock, we might have showed ourselves without danger of discovery. The Virgin herself, I have always believed, aided me in overcoming this difficulty.

One evening we espied a hamlet in a little valley beneath us. I decided to go down to the wells after water, for this was our greatest need. By the pools, as I neared them, I could see the washings hung to dry. No one seemed to be watching them for the moment.

I filled my *olla* quickly, and snatched from the *mesquites*<sup>58</sup> two laborers' trousers and coats.

Would the Padre be angry with me for my thefts, I wondered? I showed them to him with some fear of a rebuke.

But as he looked at them and at me, a wonderful light of comprehension shone in his eyes.

"*Niñita*," he said, "surely our Father hath guided you in all that you have done. I thank God daily for your brave heart and ready wits. As for the poor peasants yonder, may his blessing make up to them their loss,—a loss of what they would gladly give could they know our need."

With his knife, the Padre helped me to cut and fashion one of the suits to my size. He also sheared my long hair with the same dull tool. Our appearance thus altered, we were able to go more openly and comfortably, to the Padre's great relief. We now approached the city, in sight of whose domes and towers we had already traveled for a week. As I watched

the Padre striding on ahead of me, his tonsure overgrown with hair, and further hidden by a battered hat, his face bearded, the cotton trousers flapping on his bare legs, I could myself scarcely believe that he was indeed the courtly Father I had known.

A similar thought was doubtless in his mind, as he turned to look at me, plodding along behind him.

*"Andale, muchacho,"* <sup>59</sup> he called back, not for my benefit, but for that of a company of horsemen who were passing us at the time.

As I came up, he motioned to a seat on the bank beside him, and looked me over, from my hair, bobbed to shoulder length and wound, after the fashion of the boys of my tribe, with a cotton rag, to my unsandaled feet.

"My child," said he, "let us sit here a few moments and rest. We are now about to enter on the most dangerous part of our quest. You, who have been so brave and so wise hitherto, will you also be equal to the strain in the great city, where all is strange to you?"

"With your help, Father, and that of the Blessed Mary," I answered humbly, looking across the hot, treeless plain which seemed to bring the city almost within touch. "Besides, it will not be all strange to me. Ramon will be there."

The Padre made no response for some time. "When you last heard from Ramon, he said that his Master had been drawn into the Madero faction, and had become a captain in the cavalry, did he not?"

"Yes, and Ramon himself is a soldier, and has a black horse to ride!"

"Precisely," said the Padre. "And it may be very dangerous for us to discover ourselves to him. Had you considered that?"

"To Ramon? Oh, no, my father, you do him an injustice. But of course you do not know Ramon as I do. Only let me find him, and all will be well."

"It may be," he answered, "and it may be that he will be able to help us the more for his political connections. But it will behoove us

to exercise the greatest care, and to remember always what is at stake."

We now entered the city, Padre Francisco stalking ahead, looking the part of the Indian even to the *sarape*, made out of his brown habit, and now folded across his shoulder. I trudged along at his heels. The wide streets, the solid buildings, and the continuous passing of people on foot and in carriages confused me inexpressibly. I had all I could do to refrain from clinging to his hand. Trams clanged past us; and as darkness fell and the electric lights flashed out, each plaza that we passed became vocal with military bands. The promenading people, the music, the lights, would have made it impossible for me to realize that here too, only a few weeks before, the revolution had raged, had not Padre Francisco pointed out its ravages in occasional fallen cornices and riddled houses.

At length, in a quiet, older portion of the city, we came to the *zaguan*<sup>60</sup> of the house where Ramon's master lived. Padre Fran-

cisco, who knew the street well, looked about and drew me after him into the *patio*.<sup>61</sup> We had no sooner entered, however, than a troop of horsemen clattered down the street, and rode through the open gate.

"What have we here?" cried one of the company, looking at us sharply from under his cap, and apparently on the point of ordering us away in no very civil fashion.

My heart leaped at the sound of his voice. It seemed to me no time to hesitate. "Ramon, Ramon!" I cried.

His quickness saved us. "What, Carlito, from my native village!" He turned to the leader of the troop. "*Capitán*, I hope you will pardon the lad his lack of city manners."

The Padre and I, following his cue, made our salutations awkwardly to the Captain, in whom we recognized Ramon's master, and then passed on to the kitchen to which Ramon directed us, saying briefly, "I am indeed glad that you have come."

Perhaps half an hour later he joined us, not

in the kitchen, but in the study to which a *mozo* had come to conduct us. A table was laid there with a white cloth, and on it was bread, white as the cloth, and generous bottles of wine.

Ramon, our Ramon, knelt and kissed the Padre's hands. But me he did not kiss, only folded my fingers in his, and looked at me in a sort of dumb wonder, and I looked at him.



## CHAPTER VIII

THE excitements of the revolution in Lerma, and the duplicity of the *administrador*, who, with the *jefe*, was now high in the counsels of the winning side, had prevented Ramon from hearing anything of our dreadful fate.

"*Maldición de Dios!*" he exclaimed, rising and digging his nails into the quick flesh of his clenched hands, as the terrible story was unfolded. "The scoundrels, the murderers! It is only this morning that Almonte stopped me and told me that Don Luis and the Señorita had sent me their remembrances! How did he dare? But that explains why he has suddenly become so civil. May God reward him!" and Ramon cursed the *administrador*.

"Restrain yourself, Ramon," the Padre counseled, motioning him to his seat. "To

you, too, the horror will become familiar. We rely upon you to help us find our dear friends who, God willing, are still alive. We must in particular, effect the rescue of the Señorita and little Félix."

Ramon understood the necessity, even better than we. With an iron will that molded his boyish face like a mask, he controlled his passion, and sat long with the Padre at the table, discussing the political situation and perfecting our plans.

To me, only a girl, and worn with the responsibilities and dangers of our long flight, it was very sweet to give over the planning to those two who knew so well the strange ways of the great world into which our tragedies had plunged us. I listened till my tired head sank lower and lower, and I fell asleep.

Hours later, through the deep slumber that held me, I felt Ramon's arms about me as he carried me to bed. "Sleep well, little sister," I heard him say. He stooped to seal my eyelids with kisses that seemed to weight them

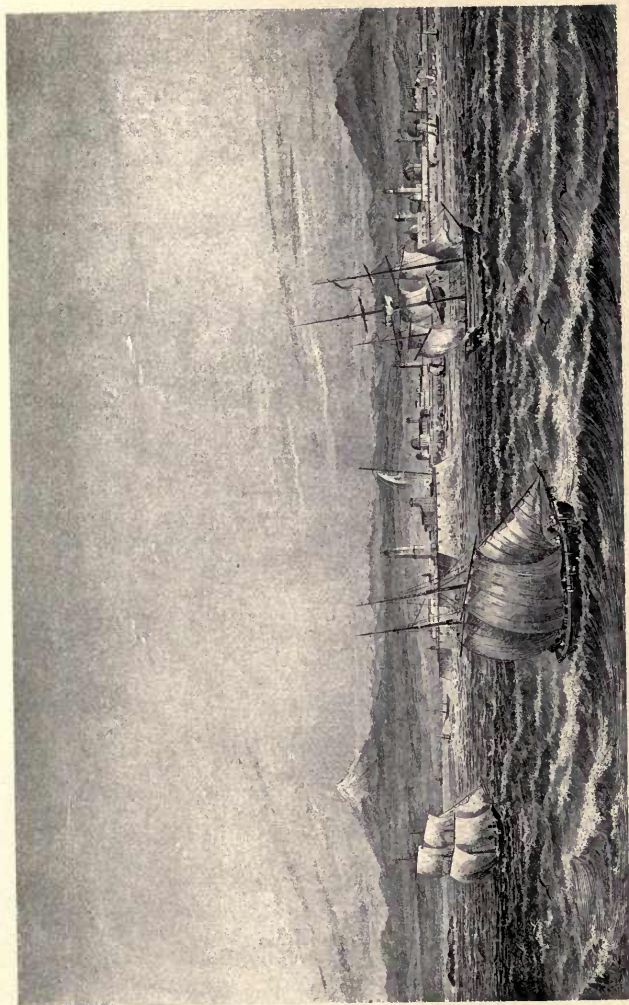
still more heavily, and left me to my dreams, —dreams of dancing water, of our wattled hut, of Grandfather, Grandmother, and Ramon.

I woke to a freshly whitewashed room, and to sunlight sifting through closed shutters upon a cool, tiled floor. At first, it seemed to me I was back at the *Casa Grande*, and involuntarily I reached out for Félix's crib. My hand instead touched the coarse cloth of a clean little cotton suit, laid across the chair beside me. The sight of it recalled me to the present, and to the heartache that seemed the more unbearable after my happy dreams.

But at least I had found Ramon. Even as I realized this, he tapped at the door, and told me that he had prepared my bath. It seemed so natural that he should take care of me that I did not realize until long afterward his thoughtfulness, nor the risk he ran in thus secreting us two fugitives in his Master's house. With his own hands he served our breakfast of rolls and chocolate, before he mounted his horse and rode away.

The plans of the previous evening bore speedy fruit. The next night found the Padre and myself settled in poor and noisy lodgings in the street that ran opposite the Plaza of the *Penitenciaría*. In this gloomy building, Ramon surmised, Don Luis might now be imprisoned. The charge against him was sure to be a political one, preferred by Almonte or the *jefe* or both, and he would therefore be held *incommunicado*.<sup>62</sup> If a trial had taken place, he might be already in the loathsome dungeons of San Juan de Uloa, hundreds of miles away, in the harbor of Vera Cruz. Or, he might be dead. Ramon had little hope of finding out what had become of him. But about a woman and a child, there was sure to be some talk.

In the plaza, in front of the *Penitenciaría*, was held each morning a flourishing market. Here, later on, with money furnished by Ramon, the Padre purchased the privilege of a booth. Our stock in trade consisted of bright-hued *petates* and baskets which I colored and wove in the patterns used by our village, and



SAN JUAN DE ULLOA



handed down, I suppose, from the times of our ancestors. It would have been safer, perhaps, could I have changed these patterns; for many times, when the *administrador* or the *jefe* passed by on their way to the jail, I shrank back fearing that they might notice something familiar in the gay mats and baskets which, by their very novelty, attracted an unusual amount of attention. But it is doubtless true that a man's eyes do not see trifles like a woman's. To Lucio Almonte, moreover, we were dead, and our ghosts did not trouble him.

The rest of the market about us was taken up with the usual displays of fruit and vegetables, chickens and eggs. There were besides, the flocks of turkeys which made their headquarters here, but were driven through the streets to the kitchens of their purchasers. There were booths draped with homespun cotton cloths, or machine-made laces from *los Estados Unidos de America*,<sup>63</sup> and others where the fine, banded potteries of Lerma were displayed. At still others, molders of clay

or carvers of wood offered to make your portrait while you waited, at twenty-five *centavos* per head. Under the *portales*<sup>64</sup> at the northern end, leather dealers hung ill-smelling shoes and saddles. *Nieve*-makers,<sup>65</sup> flower-girls, and candy-venders threaded the narrow aisles between the booths, crying their wares. About the fountain, in the center of the market, the hubbub was always at its highest and gossip most to be heard.

Back and forth to this fountain I passed many times a day, saying little, but seeing much. Here came the guards from the *Penitenciaría*, to loiter with the blue-shawled Indian girls who also came to fill their *ollas*, and here the relatives or friends of those imprisoned often lingered, while waiting for admission, in the cool shade of the flowering orange trees. Both the custodians and the friends of the victims took this opportunity to carry on a quiet trade of their own, either in the personal belongings of the prisoners or in trifles made by them to be sold for food.

Whether the money realized from these sales found its way to the owners, Padre Francisco much doubted. But at any rate, the traffic in carved peach seeds, horse-hair brushes and the like was brisk.

While Padre Francisco,—who also learned to make as well as to sell our wares,—and I were thus all eyes and ears in the market, Ramon lounged, haughtily to be sure, about the barracks. He was also so diligent in service and withal so dashing a rider, that his Captain was pleased to secure his admission into his own exclusive Club. Here, as I have heard Ramon tell it, his part was a very humble one, consisting chiefly in furnishing a fourth in the officers' stringed quartet. But in the intervals of playing, he had opportunity of watching closely the other members, among whom Lucio Almonte and the *jefe* were loudest in talk. This was no doubt due to the fact that wine and beer were plentiful, and good fellowship a political asset.

One night, doubly dark with terrific wind

and rain, Ramon came to our rooms. As he dropped his dripping cloak and *sombrero* on the floor, and drew up his chair to the brazier, I was startled by the pallor of his face.

"They are drunk over at the Club, and therefore I have news." He put his hands before his eyes as if to blot out some intolerable picture.

"Speak," said the Padre sharply.

As for me, I laid my cheek against his hands. "Tell me, brother, is it Félix?"

"No, not Félix; of him I know nothing." He shuddered. "Almonte, that devil—to-night he boasted that Doña Marina was dead."

A groan broke from the Padre; he made the sign of the cross, and then I could see his lips moving in prayer.

"Don Luis has been sent to San Juan de Uloa," Ramon continued in a dry, lifeless voice. "Better dead, too, I say!"

"And of Félix, nothing?" the Padre asked at length.

"No; I daresay Félix would not interest Al-

monte except as a means of extorting money—or worse. By his political ruse—I believe Don Luis was accused of being the author of some kind of socialistic *pronunciamiento* <sup>66</sup> hostile to the Government—Almonte and the *jefe* secured the entire estate by simple gift from the new Government in reward for their zeal.” He paused. “The Señorita, I understood him, died to-day. It may be; if so, Félix may still be alive. I waited until they were drunk, but I heard nothing more. *Ojalá!*” <sup>67</sup> he burst forth in sudden fury, “that I had killed them where they sat!”

“Patience, my son, patience. Félix’s life, not to mention ours which are dear to you, hangs on your discretion. Wisdom beyond your years has been given to you in this matter, and strength will be given likewise.” He laid his hand soothingly on the boy’s shoulder, racked with noiseless sobs. “I could wish the Captain might help us in this dilemma,” he continued, when Ramon had regained his self-control.

"I also. He is a generous and noble man, and a friend of Don Luis's as well. Nothing would seem more natural than to ask him, and I have found myself almost doing it a dozen times. Nothing but your own advice to the contrary, Father, has restrained me. But I believe that you are right, that in these days we can trust very few, and even when we do trust them, have no right to endanger them in the ruin which hangs over us."

In spite of my grief these words of Ramon's made me very proud. By the same course of reasoning he, who did not by birth belong to my village, might have shirked the responsibility of helping us. That it did not occur to him to do so, simply showed that he was Ramon. My heart became lighter. Surely the good God would crown such faithfulness with success. Félix must be found!

But still the days went by, and there was no sign. The heat of summer beat down on the dusty market, and made our rooms an oven. The Padre, who had not yet recovered from his

wound, drooped visibly. But he never complained; his anxiety seemed to be all for me.

"*Pobrecito*," he said to me many a time, patting my cheeks, "is it not too hard for you? Courage, we *must* know soon."

Had it not been for the showers which came, often with great violence, to refresh the parched city, it seems as though we should have died. But after these downpours even the foul-odored market bloomed into beauty, and the cool winds healed us.

One noon-time, after one of these hard showers, I went over to the fountain. There were comparatively few idlers there yet, for big drops still rained down from the over-weighted trees. But among the little groups was one of the prison guards with whom I had become acquainted, making a practice of buying his trinkets when they were not too dear.

"*Hola*, there, boy," he bawled now. "I suppose you do not want to buy a doll?" He held up by one leg a dilapidated, ragged object for

me to see. My heart stood still; the doll was the one Ramon had carved so long ago for Félix, the little one's treasure, without which he refused to go to sleep! Alive or dead, this soldier knew what had become of my darling.

"But perhaps you are too old," he continued, mercifully misunderstanding my embarrassment. At this sally the crowd laughed.

I sat down on the coping of the fountain to steady myself. "Let me look at it," I said, and so got the doll into my hands. "Bah! it is a sorry enough looking thing, its clothes in rags, its nose worn off (Oh, I knew why, with how many low croonings, and sweet, sweet child kisses.)—Still, how much do you want?"

"A *peso*." The crowd laughed again.

I kept an eye on them to see how their temper ran as I continued my barter. Some bystander, for sheer waggery, might defeat my purpose.

"A *peso*," I cried in feigned scorn. "And pray how does it happen, Señor, that so val-

uable an object falls into your hands? I did not know that you made prisoners of girls!"

"Girls indeed! And he bargaining for a doll himself. Why not a boy, my lad?"

"Oh, as to that, who wouldn't want so lovely a thing?" I held up the doll for the crowd to see, and got my laugh in turn. "But what-sized lads, then, are you in the habit of keeping? I shall begin to fear you, my friend."

The guard evidently thought that my chaffing had gone too far. "Look you, for a *peso* you may know,—and not without," he said sulkily.

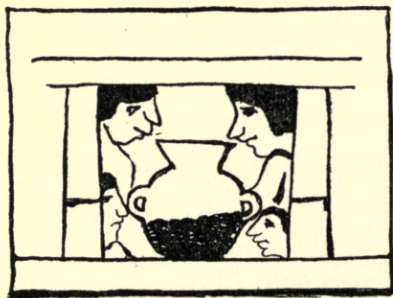
I dropped my banter at once. "*Bastante*,<sup>68</sup> here are fifty *centavos*. And now," I linked my arm in his, "tell me truly. Is he a little boy? See, I had a brother once—" I stopped and looked at him.

A light of sympathy replaced the cunning of his eyes. "Is he dead?"

I could not answer.

"So," he said gently, seeming to consider. He looked around carefully and lowered his

voice. "The little fellow in there is about the height of my hand. God forgive me! he is just the age of my Pepito,—and hungry. I thought to buy him bread!"



## CHAPTER IX

FELIX was found!

For just such an opportunity as this the Padre had saved our *centavos*, day by day, and Ramon had added to them.

"Come," said I. "My father,"—this being the relationship the good Padre gave out as existing between us,—“has also a most tender heart. Let us see what we can do together for that poor child.”

He followed me to the booth, which was deserted by customers both because of the recent storm, and because of the daily *siesta*<sup>69</sup> hour.

"Father," said I, "see this doll I have bought. It belongs to a little boy in the prison. This man says he is hungry and sick."

Padre Francisco looked at me as he took the doll in his hands, and I saw that he understood. Then I left the two men together, and went

to give Ramon the signal we had agreed upon, sure that the Padre, in his infinite knowledge of the human heart, could unlock those frowning prison gates. By some means I knew, when I next saw him, he would have Félix in his arms.

For the last time I passed through the market, doffing my hat to the salutations of the sleepy-eyed women in the booths, whom I had come to know so well, and out into the sun-drenched streets. The clattering trams and the engines that puffed and shifted importunately about the station, were the only things moving, it seemed, in all the city, besides myself. The long windows of the houses were shuttered, and even the store fronts were put up against the glare of light. I hurried silently along in my sandals, past the *Palacio de Gobernación*,<sup>70</sup> the cathedral, across the *Paseo*,<sup>71</sup> and on to the barracks. Ramon would not be there until the bugles blew for the parade at four. But in the stables was another friend whom I was sure of finding, Ra-

mon's coal-black horse, Mogul. Many a time had I slipped into his stall, just as I was doing to-day, with bits of sugar-cane tucked into my hat or belt, to feel his soft nose hunt them and see the pleasure he expressed so well with his quick ears and liquid eyes.

But it was with a new feeling of proprietorship that I stroked Mogul's silky neck and fed him his sweets this day. As I whispered in his ear, he too knew the difference; perhaps, who knows, he understood that on him hung the lives of those I loved most in the world, Félix and the Padre and Ramon?

But I could not linger. With a final caress, I took my blue cotton head-band and tied it to Mogul's bridle that was hanging in the stall. This was the signal we had agreed on, in case Félix was found. As I knotted the cloth in place, I thought it a fortunate omen that it was of blue, the color of the Virgin. I prayed silently, "Mary, Mother of God, save us!" Mogul nosed my hand, and I was gone.

The plans we had perfected for our flight

during our months of waiting were complete in every detail. An unoccupied adobe hut on the outskirts of the town, which Ramon had rented long since, was my next destination. Down the long streets, now beginning to be shaded by the westering sun, I trudged. The houses on either side opened their eyes, as it were, in lifted shutters and unbarred gates, to the cooler air, and the sleepers came to life. As well hidden by the crowd as by the previous solitude, I arrived at length at our hut.

For an instant, so great was my suspense, I almost swooned. The shutters were fastened; the door was locked; to all appearances the house was still tenantless. Yet even as I looked my heart leaped within me; the dust on the latch bore the imprint of a thumb. To my whistle, the cry of the plover, so familiar about our old home, the Padre opened the door. I stumbled in and fell on my knees beside the cot where my precious Félix lay. It was more by touch than by sight that I found him, in the dim light, and gathered him into my arms.

The Padre had told him that I was coming; in fact, he said afterwards it was only the repetition of my name which had roused the sick child from the torpor in which he found him. Possibly the guard had drugged him to prevent his crying out, though the Padre, who kept his hand on Félix's slow, slow pulse, was inclined to think that starvation was a sufficient cause for his weakness. His only sign of recognition was the utter content with which his head turned and rested upon my breast. The sweetness of that pressure, I shall never, never forget.

It was well for me that I could not then see what the next day's light revealed, the hollow circles beneath the long lashes, and the little hands, so transparent that the bones showed through the flesh. Otherwise, I should not have had the courage to let the Padre leave me, as he did soon, to continue his journey on foot; nor indeed, to undertake our own flight that night.

"Remember," Padre Francisco whispered.

"Give him a little of the white of egg and wine in this cup every hour and a spoonful of medicine every alternate hour until you start, and do not lose courage. Ramon should be here in four hours now, and you will find me waiting for you at the Pass of the Holy Cross."

A changed quality in the Padre's voice caught my ear, long accustomed to the Indian patois he had adopted to further our disguise. As his outline showed in the open door, I realized that he had changed his peasant dress as well, and had resumed his cassock and cowl. With the child in my arms, I knelt and kissed the crucifix hanging from his girdle.

"O my father, bless us both," I implored, "before you go."

He raised his hands and eyes in benediction, and went out into the night.

Comforted by the Padre's familiar voice and touch and by the blessing he had invoked, I laid Félix, still sleeping, on the cot, and completed my own preparations for the journey.

It touched me greatly to find that the child had already been washed and dressed. The candle, which with the darkness we had been compelled to light, showed him, alas, how wan and pale, in the little suit I had made and hidden for him there! So thoughtfully the Padre had done the office of a nurse, sparing me the responsibility of disturbing my darling's rest and the shock of finding how thin he had grown.

As for myself, I had only to slip from my white trousers and coat and resume my blouse and skirt. Over my short hair I threw a *rebozo*<sup>72</sup> in place of my steeple hat, tied up the discarded garments with the bundle of necessary articles we had hidden here from time to time, and sat down beside the cot once more to wait for Ramon.

As I waited, measuring the passing of time by the burning of the candle, my mind busied itself with conjectures about the outlaw life to which we were committed through no crime of ours, and the terrible dangers to which it

exposed us. The Padre had decided that our safest course lay to the southward, across the lake, and up into the mountains beyond. There, so steep were the *barrancas*, and so poor and little traveled the trails, that even the *bandidos* <sup>73</sup> had no fastnesses. It was a country well known to him in his earlier missionary journeyings among the wild tribes of Indians with whom he had lived before he went to Cuba, or knew Doña Marina, or came to the *hacienda* with her. In inaccessible upland valleys around—as yet—uncoveted springs, some Indians of our own race still lingered. But for long leagues the mountains were totally uninhabited save by the wild creatures of the wilderness. The spot he had chosen for our home, he described to Ramon and me with great beauty of language, until it seemed to us, by contrast with the squalid lodgings in Lerma, as unreally lovely as a dream. But now, with Félix at last beside me, might not the dream come true?

It did not occur to me to fear, except for

Félix, so absolute was my faith in the Padre and Ramon. As the night wore on, even this anxiety relaxed with the stronger beating of his heart, and the evident ease of his slumber. About midnight, my ears, sharpened by the constant dangers of the past six months, caught the soft thud, thud of unshod hoofs on the road from Lerma. I snuffed out my candle and waited. Presently the hoofbeats ceased; there was a scuffling of light sand in the courtyard, followed by Ramon's familiar tap on the door.

He paused for nothing save a brief "Is all well, *hermanita?*"<sup>74</sup> and went out again to tie the bundles of provisions to the saddle. Félix, roused from his sleep by the disturbance, began to whimper.

In an instant Ramon was back. "*Pobrecito, pobrecito,*" he crooned. "There, there, do not cry. See, it is I, your Ramon. I take you so, in my arms, gently, gently. All night you shall lie in them safe and warm. So, *pobrecito*, hush!"

I meantime had finished the lading of the saddle and locked the door of our refuge, in which no trace of our occupancy was left. Ramon, scarcely touching the stirrup, sprang into the saddle. I mounted behind him.

“Now, Mogul,” said the master, “go.”

The horse, which had stood with the stillness of a statue until he heard this word of command, moved lightly and swiftly as a shadow, out of the gate and along the starlit road. So even was the motion that Félix, lulled as if in a cradle, drifted again into blessed sleep.

When we were entirely free of the city, and out on the open plain, Ramon began to speak softly. “See you now, Porfiria, why I took such pains with the horse? In all the command, there is no pacer like him. And the best of it is, no one knows that he can pace. Even if I were followed to the hut—which I doubt—our pursuers from there on will find no trace of galloping hoofs.”

"But the dogs, my brother?"

Ramon suppressed something like a sob. "It is for that, as you know, that we must leave Mogul at the shore and trust ourselves to the boat. I shall not be missed till morning. By that time, God willing, he should be well back toward Lerma, and we," he wet his finger and held it up to discover the direction of the wind, "already far out on the lake."

"The boat, you are sure it is safe, then?"

"Last week when I rode down to see it, yes. I put into it then some tools I had not thought to carry with me before. If it has been discovered and stolen,—we will still try with Mogul." He leaned forward to whisper in the horse's delicate ears.

Mogul's hoofs became even more noiseless, as he listened. I doubt if he could have been detected ten feet away by any save an Indian. We, too, became silent. We were approaching the foothills of the mountains that lay between us and the lake. In and out of the shadows, now upward, now down the sides of

bottomless *barrancas*, we wound till we neared the break in the range known as the Pass of the Holy Cross. There the Padre, who had by that time eight hours the start of us, should be waiting. From that point the mountains dipped abruptly to the lake.

As we traveled thus the trail which the Padre and I found so long, I wondered if even yet his strength would suffice to make this journey of ten leagues in one night. It was with utter thankfulness, therefore, that we came upon him, immovable and well-nigh invisible in his dark habit, seated on the pile of stones beneath the cross which marked the last resting place of some traveler less fortunate than we. The cross above this spot, mute witness where some foul murder had in all probability been committed, gave to the Pass its name.

Here I dismounted, and the weary Padre took my seat. The trail now descended so abruptly that my nimble feet were well able

to keep pace with those of Mogul, as he picked his way, with infinite care, down the steep mountain side. Even so, Félix's sleep was broken by the short, uneasy steps, and he began to moan. We made a little halt while the Padre gave him a stimulating drink. Then I wrapped my darling in the folds of my *rebozo*, bound the ends over my shoulders, and carried him thus on my back.

In this way the last league of our journey was accomplished. The first gray of dawn found us on the shore. There, in the bamboo thicket where the Padre and I had left it, lay our boat. We baled it out, placed on the bottom dry *petates* and on them our provisions. It only remained for Ramon to turn Mogul loose before we embarked.

Despite the thanksgiving in all our hearts for the rescue of Félix and the auspicious beginning of our flight, Ramon felt sorrow as well in parting from his beloved horse. To reward with ingratitude the devotion of two

years, during which Mogul had been his faithful companion, seemed unbearable. Ramon stood for a moment by his head, unbuckled his bridle, and led him to the lake to drink. Then from his pockets he drew a little hoard of sugar cane stalks, and fed them to him bit by bit. Last he ungirthed the saddle and threw it, with the bridle, into the boat. Behind us we must leave nothing, horse or trappings, by which our flight might be traced. We were fugitives from justice now; and the hard law of the fugitive is that he who is caught may be shot.

"*Adios*, my friend," I heard Ramon say. His lips brushed the broad forehead between those honest eyes. With a quick cut of the fingers he sent the horse galloping up the trail.

Long after our boat had caught the breeze, and Félix was again rocked to sleep, I fancied I heard that wild flight of Mogul's up the steep mountain side. In Ramon's heart, how much

louder it must have echoed! Yet he said nothing, only, when he dropped the saddle overboard presently into the deep water, I saw two tears fall also.



## CHAPTER X

ALL day we held our course across the lake toward the little harbor on the opposite shore that the Padre had in mind. Often we looked behind us for a pursuing sail, but there was none. Though it was not probable, in the uncertain policies of the hour, that we should be followed, the Padre thought it wisest to risk no delay. Toward evening the breeze died down, and he and Ramon had several hours of heavy sculling before we made port. In the darkness we unloaded our scant possessions on the shore. Then Ramon shoved off the boat and scuttled it. It was impossible for us, exhausted as we were, to go further that night. Sheltering ourselves as best we could under some spreading trees, we fell asleep, for what might be the last time in our lives, to the music of the lake.

Félix wakened me the next morning.

"Mama, Mama," he was crying, "do not leave me with Lola. Take me with you." His terrified voice rose to a scream.

In an instant, my arms were around him. Soothed by my kisses, he woke from his terrible dream, and sobbed brokenly, with soft brushings of my neck with his fingers, to assure himself that I really held him as I said. In all the months that followed, it was only by such occasional outbreaks that we learned anything of the cruelties he had undergone, or of those who perpetrated them. We never questioned him, hoping that he might forget; and in his waking moments, aside from the haunting fear that sometimes sat in his eyes, he gave no clew. Better so. Of the living he could tell us nothing; of the sufferings of the dead, God rest her soul, it were well if he never had to know.

Our journey from the shore to our final destination, high up among the mountains, was but a repetition, for a longer period, of incidents similar to those I had undergone in my

flight with the Padre to Lerma. Our speed was impeded by the sick child, for whose food Ramon and the Padre foraged as we went, and by the weight of the burdens which we carried. Sometimes our food consisted of a drink of goat's milk, stolen from the charge of some unwary goatherd, or the more delicate milk of the cocoa-nut, or the eggs of a nesting quail.

We traveled in the early morning and late afternoon, resting through the heat of the day, until we left behind us the *tierra caliente*,<sup>75</sup> and entered the uplands of the *tierra templada*.<sup>76</sup> Here, mingled with the more tropical foliage with which Ramon and I were familiar, were to be found trees that were new to us,—the oak, the mountain ash, the juniper, and the long-needed pine. Small game was abundant, as were birds of many kinds. By setting traps around the springs where we camped, we were able to catch all that we needed. Still upward we climbed; and now the nights became cold; the cacti and mesquite of the arid lowlands no longer appeared, but were replaced by meadows



THE REGION OF THE PINES



green with grass or bright with flowers and set in noble groves. Water flowed abundantly from snow-fed sources; yet the land was uninhabited. Infrequently we skirted Indian hamlets, or saw some lone herder; but we ourselves went unseen.

At sunset one day we came at last to the spot which Padre Francisco had selected for our home. It was a cleft in the very top of a lofty mountain range. To reach it, we had passed the timber line on the cold northern slopes, and traversed a ridge which was blue with fringed gentians, and low-growing huckleberries. From this growth the crown of the mountain rose, a mass of precipitous rocks, pierced by a narrow defile no wider than a door. Even this opening would have been inconspicuous to one who did not know it. But the Padre knew it well. With his *machete* he cleared a passage way through a huge, entangling vine. Along the edge of the tiny brook, whose waters in long centuries had worn this little gorge, we followed him.

The Padre drew aside presently and held out his arms. "Behold, my children, here is our home; here is La Paz," <sup>77</sup> he said.

Peace indeed brooded over the little valley that spread before us in the slanting beams of the sunset. Open to the southward, and sloping gently to the cliffs that formed a sheer descent on that side, it seemed made to catch and hold in its green bowl the warmth of summer here on the very mountain tops. A shimmer of dancing aspen leaves canopied the gray cliffs to the north, wherever the slender trees could lodge; grass and ferns carpeted the ground, and spread upward in crannies and crevices about the roots of the trees. Toward the western end, opposite the entrance, was the source of the trickling brook, in a clear deep spring. Around it grew a cluster of cottonwood trees. The entire valley, I suppose, was not more than one *hectare* <sup>78</sup> in area; all its beauty was spread before us at a glance.

Ramon was the first to voice the admiration

of our hearts. "How beautiful!" he exclaimed, "and how safe!"

"Wait, there is more to see, and I must show it to you while there is still light." The Padre scanned the ground eagerly. "Strange that no wild beasts seem ever to have made their lairs here. See, here are only the tracks of harmless deer. It was so when I visited the valley last. But I want to make doubly sure ere night falls. Ramon, come with me."

He preceded Ramon for a few feet along the northern wall of cliffs, stopped abruptly, and began to tear away a mass of morning-glory vines. Ramon, pistol in hand, watched the work while Félix and I waited at the entrance. Soon the Padre called us, in a voice that assured us that all was well. We ran to the morning-glory vine, and stepped through the opening we found there into a fairy world.

The grotto we entered was not large, but of dazzling splendor, because of the crystals of copper of which its walls and ceiling were

made; studded in places as if with gold, fretted into azure fringes, or hung with draperies of softest green, its beauty was almost supernatural. The whole cave formed a shallow room, from which two other apartments might be said to open off, such was the effect given by the curiously eroded pillars which divided the space. All three rooms were roughly parallel with the valley, and opened on it in irregular perforations, hidden from the outside by vines. In fact, the whole might be described as a vine-hung portico. Of this place, so evidently suitable for our temporary home, the dear Padre, in all his descriptions of the valley, had told us nothing.

He and Ramon were in one of the inner rooms when we broke in upon them.

"But, Father," I cried, unable to contain my wonder, "why in your stories of our valley, did you never mention this?"

The Padre laughed outright, and caught up Félix to his shoulder, so that he might examine a portion of the crystal arches with his hands.

“Partly because I could not quite trust my memory. It might be damp, it might be a cave of *tigres*, it might have been defaced by the Indians, who used to come and worship here,—*quién sabe?*”<sup>79</sup> His words were spoken with an exasperating drawl. “And partly, without doubt, because I wished to give my three dear children a most lovely surprise. Tell me, are you not quite satisfied?”

Satisfaction hardly expressed our feelings as we sat around the campfire that night and discussed the possibilities of our new home. As a precaution against wild intruders, we had barred the entrance to the valley with a breast-work of hastily gathered stones. Against the cold, we drew around our shoulders the heavy *sarapes* we had brought with us. Long after Félix fell asleep in the little *petate* hammock we were in the habit of hanging for him each night, we still talked, Ramon rising now and then to throw fresh wood on the fire, and the tiny glen lightening and darkening with the leaping flames. Above us the stars passed so

close that it seemed as if we could touch them by reaching out our hands. In the great, unbroken stillness to southward, the Southern Cross kept watch.

The month that followed saw the completion of many of the plans we made that night; the uneven floor of the grottoes leveled with hard-trodden earth; one of the apertures in the middle room converted, by means of a rude chimney, into a fireplace; bedsteads fashioned of tree trunks and interlaced vines; and such openings as we wanted to use only for windows, built up to a good height with stones and latticed with bamboo. Over the main entrance, Ramon also built an arbor to shade us somewhat from the sun, and to its inner side fitted a door made of saplings. Thus our home became comfortable and secure.

Our furnishings were naturally meager, consisting of the few *petates*, baskets and *ollas* we had been able to carry on our backs, besides the *sarapes*, which we also used as cloaks. The main room, partitioned off by withes be-

tween the pillars, was our living-room and kitchen, and as the nights grew colder through the autumn, we were glad indeed of its grateful warmth. My chamber, which Félix shared, opened nearest the fireplace; the third was occupied by the Padre and Ramon. By day the cool, green vines, garlanded each morning by flower-discs of blue, cast a pleasing shadow over our glittering walls; but by night, the fire played on each crystal till the splendor was well nigh blinding to our eyes. Many a night, when we thought the fire was out, some charred brand flaring into life waked us with its reflected radiance. At length, despite the protests of Félix, to whom our cave was by turns a Moorish palace or the dwelling, as the Padre said the Indians thought, of the God of the Mountains, we daubed the chamber walls with ashes and mud.

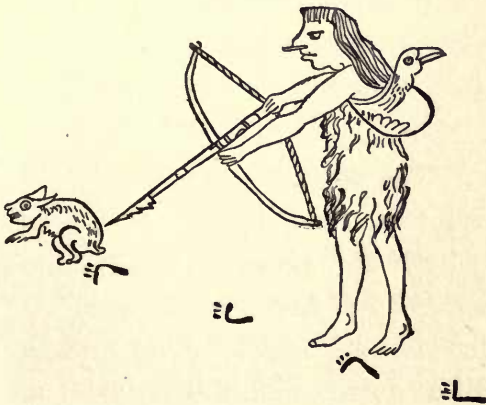
The entrance to our valley was now fitted with a strong, wicket gate. Beyond this point Félix never ventured, except with me, to pick berries or to gather flowers. But as we de-

pended almost entirely on hunting and trapping for our meat, and on wild fruits, nuts and herbs for our other food, it was necessary for the Padre or Ramon to make frequent excursions into the forest below. The rainy summer was by this time past and was succeeded, day after day, by clear and ever colder sunlight. As autumn advanced, and the moisture in the lower valleys lessened, we began to notice more tracks of little creatures which came and went through our barrier to reach the spring; rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and *zorillos*,<sup>80</sup> and among their imprints about the entrance the larger ones of deer and antelope unable to get in. These fearless beings we did not eat, though sometimes we were tempted by hunger. They became the playmates of little Félix. Even the deer and the antelope grew so tame that they ate out of his hand. Birds also came to winter with us, and ate of the berries and fruits we had spread out to dry for our own use. But we begrudged them nothing.

The joy of the child in our society and that

of his pets was only equaled by our joy in his returning health. Each morning brought fresher color to his cheeks, and clearer depths to his gray eyes, that danced with laughter also, like the sunlight in our spring.

In our hearts too, sadness and anxiety had grown mellow. The turbulent world was far away. Though our thoughts and prayers went forth often in quest of Don Luis and the scattered remnant of our Village of the Shield, we rested gratefully in the happiness of our little valley. Like the bleak mountains about us, we hoarded our sunshine there.



## CHAPTER XI

ONE night while we slept, came the first frost of the year. It was also the first frost that we, except Padre Francisco, had ever seen. Félix, who never tired of watching the opening and closing of the blue Virgin's Mantles that clambered over our windows, noticed that the beautiful blossoms were dead. The havoc wrought by this intruder, which no wicket could keep out, was more apparent when he and I went to get water at the spring. Everywhere the tender stalks of herbs and flowers had burst with the severity of the cold, their lifeblood congealed in fantastic shapes of ice. The ferns lay blackened; the aspens and cottonwoods had turned to gold. The spring itself was rimmed with delicate tracer-ies such as I had never seen before.

Félix ran hither and thither, to keep warm as well as to examine the wonders the night

had wrought. He returned to the cave laden with some fragile formations which looked like flowers of ice.

I was already at the hearth, toasting the cakes of pounded chestnuts which we ate in place of *tortillas* now that our corn meal was gone. He came and laid his strange blossoms in my lap.

"See, 'Firia, what I have brought you. Do you know what I think?" he lowered his voice. "You call it frost,—but I *almost* saw God making these, the way he made the cave. It is all alike now, there and here."

"What is this I hear?" asked the Padre, stepping from his room.

Félix stood very straight, and grave, and wise. "I only said I thought God must be out there, making another cave." His gaze returned from the crystal ceiling, to which he had raised it, to the ice-crystals he had laid in my lap. "See,—but 'Firia, where *are* they?" he broke off in consternation.

The ice-crystals had melted by the fire, even

as the lovely crystalline valley melted shortly in the sun.

Félix pondered and the Padre kept silence. Presently, "*Padrecito*,<sup>81</sup> tell me, will He then melt our cave?"

"No, my Félix, not to-day, nor to-morrow. But come, and I will begin to tell you, little son, how the great world is made."

That morning at the beginning of the cold, as winter is called with us, began also Félix's schooling. Nor were Ramon and I neglected by the Padre, who in the long days as we worked, or in the happy firelit evenings, brought forth for us from his great learning, treasures new and old. So, many a night, as I sewed the rabbit skins that Ramon had tanned, into a warm coat for Félix, or a cap for Ramon, I listened to the story of the Cid and Charlemagne. And when Ramon, making shepherd's pipes, interrupted at intervals to test their pitch, I heard in their mellow notes the battle-bugles of Roland and Moctadir.<sup>82</sup> We learned also of the more modern world, of

France, the Padre's boyhood home, of her struggles for liberty when her plight was even as ours, and of her heroic victories from the time of Joan of Arc till now. Listening to the Padre's impassioned patriotism, and watching his restless pacing, like a wild thing in a cage, we understood how his heart burned in sympathy for the miseries of our country, and yearned to help in its deliverance.

Occasional snows followed the frost, deep drifted in places on the mountain slopes, but for the most part blown clear of our valley by the high north winds, or melted by the sun. The Padre taught Ramon how to make the snowshoes he had seen used among the Indian tribes of the United States, far to the north. On these they slid at will over the slippery crust, hunting, trapping, fishing, sometimes venturing down to the borders of summer in valleys leagues below. These excursions yielded a greater variety of game than we were in the habit of killing in the immediate vicinity of the valley. Venison, antelope,

trout, even a stray *iguana*<sup>83</sup> and an occasional raccoon they brought back to me to cook.

To Ramon and the Padre, these expeditions partook sufficiently of adventure to make them a relief from our circumscribed life. But to me, left alone with Félix, the absence of our protectors was a constant source of anxiety. As the afternoon shadows lengthened, a dozen times I went to the wicket, thinking that the shaking of the wind was our returning Ramon; or I climbed the southward parapet and, shading my eyes, peered into the dizzy depths for black figures, like ants, crawling up against the snow.

With what thankfulness I welcomed them when they came, and how doubly sweet were our evenings after the long day apart! One such perfect evening I recall vividly. The Padre sat on a sort of divan we had made along one side of the fireplace, and I on a low stool at his feet. Ramon lay on some deer-skins before the fire, playing softly on his flute. Félix I had put to bed hours before, but he

heard the music and came pattering out, sleepily holding up his face for a kiss. In one hand he held the battered doll which Ramon had made for him, and to which he had clung through all our wanderings. Ramon, who never could resist the boy, threw down his flute to gather him in, close and warm, beside the fire.

"I missed you," Félix announced. "Sancho and I, we missed you much. What have you done all day?"

"Walked many miles, little one, and brought you, see!" He drew from a pouch at his belt a wilted, fragrant saxifrage.

"But where did you find it?" asked Félix after he had sniffed it delightedly, offered it to the doll, and passed it on for me and the Padre to enjoy.

"Not so far away; and if you are not too sleepy, I will tell you a secret,—and then you may tell it, if you like, to Porfiria."

"And to Padre Francisco?"

"The Padre knows it already; we found it

together where this flower grows. Listen." Ramon began to whisper, the child's eyes growing big and dark.

Presently he leaned over and put his soft mouth to my ear. "Ramon says he found this flower right here, in our own valley, this morning before he went away. He says the spring has come!"

It was true; we could see the signs of her welcome advent day by day in the swelling buds of the trees, the pushing fronds of the ferns, and the delicate fringes of greenery that began to show in warm and sheltered crannies everywhere. The birds knew of the glad arrival, and came in great numbers to make their homes among their kindred who had wintered in the valley with us. The sweet songs of wrens, which began to nest in the walls of our small canyon, woke us before the dawn; woodpeckers, with bright red crests, tapped for insects up and down the trees; kingfishers darted down to snatch up the tiny minnows that lived in our brook. Birds of

more gorgeous plumage came on visits from the tropics below. Sometimes a hawk or an eagle, soaring overhead, created no small excitement among these feathered guests of ours. But except for such disturbances, they lived in harmony with themselves and with us. Félix added them all to his family of pets. I have even seen him stroking the silken back of a green warbler sitting on her eggs.

By now the *primavera*<sup>84</sup> and viburnum were well budded, and leaves were pushing from all the trees. But alas for birds and flowers, we were yet to have one more taste of winter ere summer really came. One noon, the south wind veered to the north, driving with it huge, moist clouds which enveloped the mountain top so densely that we could scarcely see our hands before our eyes. It became bitterly cold. Presently the clouds precipitated themselves in a fine, driving snow. To increase our anxiety, Ramon had set forth in the morning, and had not yet returned. The birds, poor things, caught unaware, like our-

selves, voiced their distress in blind flutterings and piercing cries. Félix's doves took refuge with us in the cave, and many of the other birds followed them. Here and in the arbor, where the snow did not fall, Félix scattered crumbs, while the Padre went out from time to time and brought in little numb bodies to be warmed into life by the fire. My housekeeping was in confusion, and my mind was on Ramon.

It was useless, as the Padre said, to attempt to find him in the snow and mist. Nor would any sound we might make reach him through the howling of the storm. Doubtless, the Padre was right in thinking he had found asylum far below out of its range, or sheltered himself in some cave. For food he would not lack, so long as he had his pistol and the bow and arrows which he also carried with him. But my eyes saw him falling headlong down some unseen precipice or frozen, like the birds, in the snow.

All night the storm continued. But toward

morning the wind fell somewhat and the snow ceased. I determined to try an expedient, which I had thought of in the darkness, for guiding Ramon home. The Padre, who had gone out at intervals through the night, to see that the mouth of the ravine was kept clear in case Ramon by a miracle should be able to find his way, was sleeping. Félix also slept. I stole into the main room, and took down from its peg on the wall a wind harp which Ramon had just finished, intending to hang it on one of the tall *clavillina*<sup>85</sup> trees, and thus fill our valley with harmonies that would blend with those of the birds. Fog, I knew from experience on the lake shore, was a good conductor of sound, and I would hang the harp in the vines of the defile, through which the wind might sweep the sounds far down the mountain sides.

I was preoccupied with my task, which was not an easy one. Suddenly I was startled by Félix's voice rising out of the mist behind me.

"Bad doggie," he was saying, "go away! You have killed my birds. Go away!"

Dogs? *Wolves*. I ran blindly toward the spot from which the sounds had come. Out of the mist loomed two gaunt, gray bodies. Almost within reach of their snarling jaws stood Félix, regarding them with blazing eyes. A pigeon, all dabbled with blood, was folded to his breast. The wolves, held by his gaze, did not move, even at my approach. Before I could snatch the child away, I heard the Padre's voice.

*"Cuidado!"*

At the sharp warning, the wolves whirled and vanished in the mist. When the fog lifted, as by God's mercy it did with the sun, we found no trace of them. But everywhere, as the snow melted, we uncovered the feathered forms of birds. All morning Félix busied himself in the gathering of these. I could but help him, distressed as he was by grief. Like a bed of bright-hued orchids, the tiny bodies lay heaped on the floor of the cave.

But the Padre, after he had satisfied himself that no other wild beasts had slipped through our wicket, went forth in search of Ramon.

The hours dragged heavily. Among his little dead comrades Félix found one, a mocking bird, which responded to the warmth of the fire. But it did not take flight with the other birds we had revived, seeming content to rest in Félix's hollowed hands.

I examined it carefully and found the cause of its inaction in a limp and broken wing.

"See, Félix," I said, "our little friend is hurt, but if you will help me, I think we can bind up the break. And, meantime, until it is healed, we will get Ramon to make you a cage for the *caritito*.<sup>86</sup> Then, some day, we will set him free, and hear his most beautiful song of thanks."

In truth, I was glad to prattle with the boy, and to keep his mind and my own occupied with cheerful thoughts. Together we fitted a splint in place, and bound the wing firmly to the poor bird's body.

While we were thus occupied, the Padre returned, bringing with him Ramon. But such a Ramon, hollow-eyed, ragged, and stained with blood!

I sprang from my seat and forced him gently into it. Rabbit broth I had ready heating on the fire, and water fresh drawn from the spring. The Padre helped me to make him comfortable, and soon he fell asleep, so exhausted was he, in his chair.

I drew up my stool beside him, and took one hand in mine. So, mutely, I could express the gratitude of my heart at his return. Perhaps he would feel it, even through his dreams.

"Tell me, Padre, is he much ill, think you?" I whispered.

"No, little daughter; I think not, though he is too exhausted to be questioned much. I found him, as I seemed to see him through the storm, lying in the shelter of a cave in the *Barranca Azul*.<sup>87</sup> At first, I thought he was dead. But the *aguardiente* I carried with me revived him. Thank God, the blood you see

on his clothes is not his! When he has rested, he will tell us all his adventures. Meantime, he must sleep." So saying, the Padre picked Ramon up in his strong arms as easily as if he had been Félix, and laid him on his bed.

That evening, the birds, which tender-hearted Félix himself pressed upon me for his dear Ramon, made a most delicious stew. By the flare of the fire, reflected in a thousand facets, we sat down to table, a reunited family. The Padre's customary blessing took on a new significance as we thought of the dangers through which we had all so lately passed. Death had been all around us, nay, had come to our very door, yet we had been graciously spared.

As we ate, Ramon recounted his hardships in wandering through the storm. The mist had come on him so suddenly that he had no time to escape, and traveled perforce with great caution. But he wisely headed downward, instead of trying to return to us. Even a league or two would thus bring him below

the snow line, were he fortunate enough to find the *Barranca Azul*. This gorge, opening from our range, dipped swiftly, thousands of feet, to the temperature of the *tierra caliente* in the fertile valleys below. In the storm, he missed his way, drew back from a precipice barely in time and found himself in a cave,—the same near which the Padre later found him.

“*El tigre* was also there,” Ramon continued, “his eyes burning in the darkness. You may well believe that I was frightened at seeing him. But he made no move to attack me. All the wild creatures were cowed by the great storm, and in this same cave were already huddled two deer.

“By this time, I was exhausted. The storm had increased in fury, and I realized that I stood in danger of freezing, in my thin clothes. The presence of the deer reassured me. I crept up close to my strange companions, and I make no doubt they were in the end the means of preserving my life with their warmth.”

In the excitement of the story, we had all forgotten Félix. Happening to glance at him, Ramon saw that he was quivering with fright.

"*Ay de mi,*" he cried, "what have we here? This small man should have been asleep, *he!*"

"He—he used to frighten me with tigers—in the prison—at night—" The child shuddered uncontrollably, his eyes turned inward on sights that were not good to see.

Ramon, conscience-stricken at his carelessness, brought him to the fire.

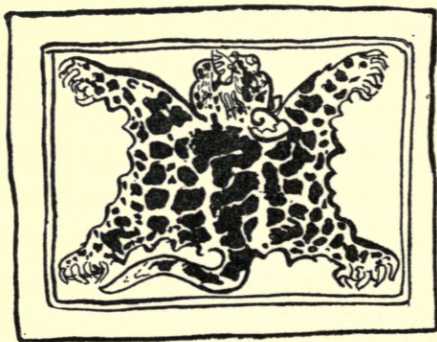
"*Pobrecito*, I should have remembered that a tiger is large, and a man-child, even so brave a one as our Félix, very small. And now, being small, I will sing to you. It is a song my mother must have sung to me, I think, when I was small like you. She held me *so*, and rocked me *so*, and sang:"

Sleep, sleep, sleep,  
Eyes like fluttering wings.  
(Hushaby, little son.)  
See, the mother bird brings  
Food for the little one.

## THE VILLAGE SHIELD

Sleep, sleep, sleep,  
Eyes like breasts of twin doves.  
(Hushaby, softly swung,  
You, whom your mother loves  
More than the doves their young.)

Sleep, sleep, sleep.  
Homing your birds will nest  
(Hushaby, never fear)  
Each in the hollowed rest  
Of your eyes, little dear.



## CHAPTER XII

FOLLOWING the untimely blizzard, spring came again, the fruit trees burst once more into flower, the *clavillinas* tasseled, and other birds took the places of those which had been destroyed by the storm. Mists and rains became frequent, and not only the valley, but all the range about and below us, was green with herbage and bright with glowing flowers. There bloomed mariposa lilies, delicate as the butterflies that sought their fragrance, columbines, red and purple, spired like the cathedral towers of Lerma, blue bells, which the fairies love, and many more. All the air was fragrant and sweet with song.

In La Paz also these flowers grew, mingled with others which loved more the heat of the sun. These flowers, planted so beautifully by nature, we did not disturb. But a portion of the greensward we plowed up for a garden,

and planted with kernels of maize, beans, and tomato seeds which we had saved for the purpose. About the garden Ramon built a trim fence of bamboo, to keep out the little four-footed gardeners, with whom we did not wish to share our precious greens. In addition to these improvements, he made a rustic *mirador*<sup>88</sup> on the outer ledge of the valley, overlooking the wonderful panorama below, and catching every breeze. Here he hung the windharp, to play to us, day and night, and here, when the weather was clear, we loved to sit. Yet our cave, warm in winter, was cool in summer, reaching as it did into the solid rock, and shaded once more by the leaves of the Virgin's Mantle against the afternoon sun. Ramon fitted the arbor in front of the door with seats, and, high up on the side, embowered in vines, he built an airy cage for Pico de Oro,<sup>89</sup> the mocking bird. Such then, amid simple joy and loveliness, was our home, La Paz.

By now Pico de Oro's wing was entirely healed, and he could have flown away to join

his brethren in their glad migration to the north. But perhaps he had been left so hopelessly behind that he had no heart to follow them. At any rate, he had become so tame that when Félix opened his cage door, expecting him to take flight, he fluttered only as far as the child's shoulder, and lighted there. Nor did he care for any other home except his cage. By day he roamed and sang at will, but night found him, head tucked in wing, on his chosen perch. Who can say that he did not realize our care for him, and feel his safety from squirrels and other enemies when the cage door was shut?

We, too, like Pico de Oro, feeling our security, began to venture more often from La Paz, our cage. With luncheon in a basket, fishing rod, bows and arrows, we went down into the forests. There, reclining on pine needles beside some rock-fretted stream, we talked or listened to the Padre's wisdom, or dreamed the hours away. But the long afternoon light brought us homeward, to find our

valley undisturbed, and filled with the cool shimmer of the aspens, which looked and sounded so like the ripple of our beloved lake.

To me, content in the society of those I loved, watched over with increasing tenderness by my brother, and watching in turn the unfolding of Félix's sweet nature, day by day, our existence left nothing to be desired. Even the Padre's teachings, which set windows, as it were, in our minds, through which we looked afar over the world, left in me only the sensations of aloofness I found in looking from our *mirador*. There was the world, indeed, full of deep *barrancas*, of wild beasts, of wilder, wicked men, but here, serene, seeing only its beauty, were we. Political factions, the rise or fall of my country, the fate of Don Luis even, what had I to do with these? Had not God in his wisdom hidden me close to Himself above them, and made it a duty that here I should remain?

Besides, I had much to occupy me, not only in the housework, but in the drying of fruits

once more and garden produce for the winter. Our cotton clothing was also wearing out, and I conceived the idea of weaving cloth with which to replace it. The Padre, who knew the crafts of the mountain Indians thoroughly, from his many journeys among them, helped me in this by preparing fibers of the *primavera* and of the bark streamers of the cottonwood for spinning. They were easily twisted with a whorl. Ramon made me a frame for the weaving, strung with the fibers, and fastened to a post of the *mirador*. A bamboo needle served as a shuttle, and my fingers as a comb. The finished cloth was coarse and stiff but wearable. For Félix's soft body, however, I cut up my full skirts.

Ramon, though he busied himself with the garden, with carving, and with the delicate making of a violin, had a more active mind than I. I could see that he grew restless, and the Padre's face also became more thoughtful with the approach of autumn. They talked much together pacing back and forth under

the trees or along the level edge of the cliffs. As I watched them, looking up from my weaving, I became aware suddenly that the top of Ramon's head was on a level with the Padre's ear. How tall he had grown without my noticing it! My heart contracted. A year had transformed him; the sinewy figure, aquiline face, and straight carried head were no longer those of a boy, but of a man. The world upon which I looked out blurred before my eyes. It lay, not far away, indeed, but there where Ramon stood, almost within touch. No wonder he was eager to push aside our wicket gate and take his place in it!

With the approach of harvest, Pico de Oro too seemed to share our unrest and fared on longer flights beyond La Paz. Félix voiced the opinion that he was looking for his little brothers, who would be coming southward soon. Be that as it may, one evening he did not return. Félix was sick with grief. That night I took him into my own bed to comfort him. But I slept too deeply, without ears.

In the morning I woke to find my darling gone. A hurried search showed that he was not in the valley, and that the wicket was unhasped.

All day the Padre, Ramon and I searched, each in a different direction. But the little feet, shod in deerskin sandals, left no trace, nor was there any undergrowth in the forests on which shreds of his clothing might catch. Occasionally through the day, I heard the faint notes of Ramon's flute, with which he was in the habit of calling Félix, or the shouts of the Padre. But I listened in vain for any answer, and continued on my way. Well on into the evening, bright with moonlight, I sought him. At length hunger and fatigue turned my steps homeward. As I came out from the forest, my heart leaped within me. From the top of the mountain a pillar of smoke, shot with fire, streamed heavenward. It was the signal we had agreed on in case Félix was found.

I flew up the ridge to the gate. At another time, I might have paused to wonder why it was open. Now, I ran through unheeding, to

come to a full stop before a sight which froze my blood.

Were they men or devils, these painted, feathered, half-naked creatures who trampled our valley in a drunken, reeling dance, by the light of our burning home? And who was the pivot of the wild orgy, standing garlanded with flowers in the center? Could it be?—it was,—Félix! His agonized eyes caught mine on the instant. “’Firia,” he cried and started to run to me. A blue-banded demon tripped and held him. Others swarmed forward angrily. But Ramon, unknown to me, had entered the valley also. With a quick thrust, he placed me behind him.

“Stand back,” he shouted, aiming his pistol at the leader. They cowered. “Bring me the child,—the child,” he repeated pointing.

Either they could not or they would not understand. Like bees, they clustered about Félix, gesticulating and talking wildly in a language we did not know. Undoubtedly something terrible would have happened had

not the Padre come just then, attracted by the same signal we had seen so joyfully. At sight of him, the demons became perfectly silent and rigid. Suddenly, by one impulse, they groveled on the ground. The Padre, taking no notice of them except to spurn them aside with his feet, picked up the child and placed him in my lap.

With folded arms he turned then and regarded the prostrate figures. Presently he spoke, in a voice of command. They responded by laying at his feet the strange herbs by eating which they had transformed themselves from men—for men they had been—into beasts.

The Padre spoke again; they attempted, futilely, to put out the fire which was gutting our little home. But they were too exhausted with drugs and fasting; and the Padre, huddling them into the ruined garden, addressed himself to the task. Ramon and he worked manfully, but even before they began to throw on water the flames had licked the interior

nearly bare. Our cave yawned a black and smoking pit, our valley was devastated, and we were once more homeless. From the *débris*, we picked up enough scorched beans to satisfy the sharpest pangs of hunger, and left La Paz, never to return.

However, we did not go far. On the bank of a stream in a gorge we knew well, we halted. There the Padre, after satisfying himself that Félix was unhurt, though terribly frightened, went back to keep watch on the wretched Indians above. These Indians, he explained briefly, belonged to a tribe among whom he had worked as a missionary. Their home was in mountain fastnesses many leagues to the south, but every year at the harvest time, it had been their custom to pick by lot certain of their men to make a pilgrimage to our mountain top. There, in our cave, they believed, lived the "Heart of the Mountains," to whom they offered thanks for the harvest, and prayed for rain. Sometimes, it was darkly whispered, this offering used to take the form of human

sacrifice. But Padre Francisco, during his ministry, had persuaded them of the folly and sin of all this observance, going with them himself one year to the cave to celebrate the sacrament there, and thus to purify it to the service of God. From that time until the present, the Padre believed, the cave had not been visited. Still, he was well aware that superstitions are long lived, and had counted on this very fact and on the fear of the Mountain God for leagues around to protect us in our retreat.

After the Padre had left us, I picked the last withered flowers from Félix's tufted hair, shuddering to see them, and to think of the horrible fate from which we had barely saved him at the hands of those ignorant, frenzied men.

"I was hunting Pico de Oro," Félix said, in reply to our questions. "It did not seem far. And I kept playing on the shepherd's pipe Ramon made me. Pico de Oro always answered that. But I could not find him, and

I didn't know the way back. So, I went to sleep. When I woke up, those—those creatures were all around me.”

“Did they hurt you, darling?” I asked, unable to forget the heavy fall one of the painted devils had given him.

“I don't think so.” He felt himself all over gravely to make sure. “They were laughing then, and heaped me with flowers, and made me play for them on my pipes. But I was frightened. When they carried me home, even, I was frightened. And you were not there.”

“No, but we came, thank God—”

Ramon, who had been stirring about, bringing armfuls of soft needles for our beds, interrupted. “Come, Félix, see the nice place where you and Porfiria are to sleep.”

In truth it was sweet and soft, with pine branches above and pine needles below.

“But you,” I said, “where will you sleep?”

“I shall not sleep to-night.”

No coaxing could persuade him. Tired

out, Félix and I dropped to sleep, safe in the care of Ramon.

Quite late the next morning the Padre came, and brought with him the chief of the Indian village, who had been among the revelers of the previous night. A very different man he looked, with the paint washed off, his gray hair combed, and a much ashamed expression on his broad face.

"Ramon and Porfiria," the Padre said, "this man is Tezpi, chief of the Tecos tribe, a tribe of your own Tarascan blood. In other days he was my very good friend. He says he wishes to be so now."

"At your feet, Señor, Señorita," said the Indian, sweeping off his hat with a gesture of native grace.

"We are your servants," Ramon and I responded in the greeting of our country. But Félix regarded him without a sign.

"Tezpi has a remarkable proposal to make us," the Padre continued. "I will give it to you because his Spanish has become rusty with

disuse. He asks us all to accompany him to his village, and to live there with him."

Tezpi interrupted with deprecatory hands, and a torrent of earnest words.

"He says he is unworthy, a pig of a man, and that all his tribe are pigs," the Father translated literally. "But I think they are truly sorry for their heathen backsliding."

Tears came to the old Indian's eyes. Slowly he articulated his supplication: "Come, teach us, make us good."



PART III  
A SONG IN THE NIGHT





## CHAPTER XIII

“**Y**E shall have a song, as in the night . . . and gladness of heart as when one goeth . . . into the mountains of the Lord.”

Such was the text from which Padre Francisco preached his sermon the first Sunday after our arrival in the hamlet of Huitzitzilin.<sup>90</sup> To me, kneeling with Ramon and Félix among the ragged Indians on the flags of the dilapidated church, it seemed incredible that he could feel the hope that the verse expressed. As his voice flowed melodiously along in the native speech, almost unintelligible to us, my mind occupied itself with pictures of the journey with Tezpi and his followers thirty leagues through the mountains from La Paz. Our way had led through forests more luxuriantly beautiful than those we had traversed before, with every leaf and flower renewed by

reason of the summer rains. Never had I imagined a world so wholly lovely. Yet all the beauty about us seemed marred by our companions, dirty, hopeless-eyed, bearing the stamp of moral and physical starvation. And at the end of the journey, to what hovels had we come, ruinous, vermin-infested, squalid! Even in the church, I could hear the unseemly noise of fighting dogs and squealing pigs.

Nevertheless, the kindness of heart of our guide and of his people, who had come forth to welcome us as if we were of a superior race, and strewn our way with flowers, could not fail to touch my heart. They seemed especially attracted to Félix, as if trying to make up to him for the inhuman fright they had caused him, and this thoughtfulness naturally won me as nothing else could have done. As I looked about the dim church, and saw one face after another light up with the Padre's words, hope began to enter my soul also. Were they not my kindred, members even, as the Padre had told me, of my own heroic,



HUITZITZILIN



scattered tribe? What unmerited misfortune, I wondered, had reduced them to their present misery?

The location of Huitzitzilin was ideal, on the edge of a forest glade of rich pasturage, and shaded by palms, *papayas*,<sup>91</sup> and other tropical trees. The gentle slope in front of the village was dotted with wild apricots, oranges, peaches and cherries, self-sown in lovely orchards, and was bounded by a winding stream. At some distance above the village, bold crags jutted from among the trees, through which the stream, so peaceful in the meadow, fell in loud cascades. Houses and fences were hung with scarlet trumpet vines and yellow honeysuckle; as if nature tried to blot out in fragrance and color man's squalor and ugliness.

The Padre's first care, naturally, was that we ourselves should be decently housed. Under his and Ramon's directions a cottage was soon built for us, more substantial than those of the Village of the Shield, and with more

rooms than most of those contained. Set somewhat apart from the hamlet, and on higher ground, it was fresh and clean. A fence of braided straw, quickly covered with vines, inclosed enough ground for a garden.

But our garden bore strange fruit that year. The maize, which is the staple crop of all our country, had not been raised in the village fields for two years. After succeeding seasons of dry rot and drouth, had come the war. There was no longer left in the region a kernel of seed corn to plant. At least, there had not been until Tezpi's desperate expedition to La Paz had yielded him our little crop. For all their drunken thanksgiving to the Mountain God, the Indians had guarded the bulk of this treasure well, and brought home the yellow ears, worth more to them than gold. The Padre, in his unsown garden, prepared in his own way for the planting of this corn.

Hither, through the winter, came, not only the children, but the grown fathers and mothers of the village, to the open-air classes

he taught. Cleanliness and patriotism were the first lessons the children learned there. Their elders learned also the simple laws of health, and a Christianity that laid stress on deeds, rather than on catechisms.

It did not take three months for a great change to be effected in the village. One day in the spring, after the fields had been plowed and the precious corn planted in the earth, Tezpi lingered to talk with the Padre.

"Little Father," he said, "we, your children, have had it in our thoughts these two moons to repair the church." His eyes traveled from the Padre to the furrowed fields. "God, who rewarded our evil with blessing on the mountain yonder,—we wish to honor Him."

"*Bien, muy bien,*"<sup>92</sup> cried Padre Francisco. "It is what I have been waiting for you to do. For, look you, Tezpi, the church is *your* church, not *my* church. It will be what you yourselves make it, in spirit as in form."

Tezpi went away, evidently pondering much. I, too, pondered and began to understand the

Padre's method. He created the desire for good and inevitably the desire fulfilled itself. As I looked back, I saw that he had done this always, with us, as with these latest children of his love. From church to school house, from cleanliness to the building of an *acequia*<sup>93</sup> which carried water from the falls past the door of every house, the progress of the community was steady. Yet the Padre's hand in it was not apparent; he merely taught the school day by day.

There were many maidens in the village, of my age, and youths who began to look to Ramon for leadership. Most of the men and boys played the guitar, the violin or the flute, for the love of music is universal among us. These Ramon gathered together for regular practice, until he had formed a band. Soon, on moonlight nights in the little square facing the church, long files of youths and maidens walked decorously round and round to the tune of the lilting melodies, while their elders sat on benches beneath the lime trees watching,

listening, and enjoying their evening smoke. On these occasions, I walked with Félix, and what with sharing his childish delight, and glancing now and then at Ramon, who seemed to me to be unlocking music from my very soul, I thought myself in heaven.

Nahua, Tezpi's oldest daughter, was of about my age. A comely, neat-looking girl, she was most in my company of all the village maids. One day, she and Félix and I walked in the meadows, and Félix made a chaplet of flowers for each of us to wear. Coming home we passed the little reservoir which now formed the center of the village square.

Nahua stopped and called me over to the edge. "Look," she said, "see what a pretty picture we make!"

Quite startled by a thought which had never occurred to me before, I peered into the water. Two faces wreathed in flowers confronted me, hers lighter than mine, her eyes like blue convulvi, her hair reddened beneath its black gloss by the sun. My brownness, so like that

of all my people, was commonplace beside her unusual beauty. As if I had never seen her before, as in truth I had not, I remained staring at the contrast. Suddenly another face appeared above ours, that of Ramon. He dropped his arm lightly on my shoulder and drew me away.

The spell was broken. I said goodnight to Nahua and went home with him. But the thought of beauty in any relation to me was new and troubling. She was lovely, lovely as the orchids that grew in the forest. And Ramon's eyes had seemed to me to linger on her at the pool.

"Ramon," I asked, "where, think you, does Nahua get her fair beauty? It is not Indian, it is not Spanish, it is," my mind sought for a comparison, "like the whiteness of the *floripundio*." <sup>94</sup>

"Tezpi told me the other day,—” ah, he *had* noticed, then—"that it was from her mother, who belonged to a hill tribe of fair men and women like that. They have a legend among

them that this race came in ships from an island empire overseas which was destroyed, many ages ago, by a great flood."

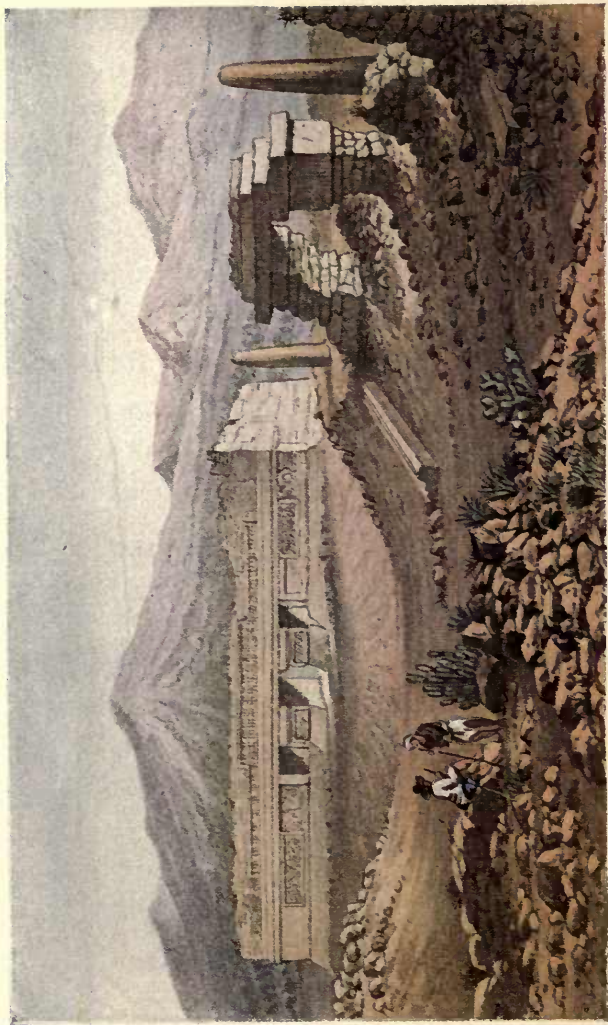
"But that is not like our legends, nor like the Bible," I objected.

"I know not," he said quietly. "To me all legends have a similarity. The Tarascan ark, in which all kinds of animals were saved, and the humming-bird (for which this village is named) which flew forth over the face of the waters, are they not like the story of Noah which the Padre tells us? The ocean, he himself says, covered more of the earth's surface in ages gone than it does now, and all of our legends, that of the ark, and of Quetzalcoatl, the great and good god of the Aztecs,<sup>95</sup> and this of Nahua's people, point to a coming of our races from other lands across the water, —who knows whence, or when?"

I relapsed into silence, feeling as if a mist, like that which used to fall suddenly on our mountain top, had enveloped me, and I were lost in the dimness of antiquity. Out of it

shone the face of Quetzalcoatl, the beneficent, who had taught the ancient Aztecs long ago, even as the Padre was teaching this poor remnant of a tribe to-day, the ways of righteousness. The ark of the Tarascans once more rode the waste of waters, and far in the distance I descried the shadowy shores of that mysterious island from which they, and we, had come. Good indeed, and human was the touch of Félix's warm fingers, which roused me from my reverie.

But the thought of our relations to an even greater world than the Padre had been able to make me see—a world in which we of Indian blood seemed cut off mysteriously from him, as from all the civilized races of the present, haunted my mind. I recalled the stories he had told me of noble ruins of temples and cities which dot our land, made by unknown hands and crumbled by time before the advent of the Spaniards four hundred years ago. To that unrecorded age belonged our fables, and from the mighty race which



THE RUINS WHICH DOT OUR LAND



had built those massive monuments we, the despoiled Indians, were descended. It gave new significance to the bursting pride I had always felt when my grandfather held Ramon and me spellbound by the hero-tales of our own tribe, and their deeds of valor in the cause of liberty. We Tarascos were the last of all the Indian nations to submit to the Spanish yoke; scattered into the mountains and on the lake shore, some of us had never submitted. Oh, that we had the strength to enlarge our freedom until it should embrace all the oppressed of our race!

This line of reasoning brought me by a circuitous route to the question which I knew was uppermost in the mind of Ramon: What had been the course of the Revolution from which we had fled, and what the fate of our friends in it? Though he and the Padre had questioned Tezpi and his people closely, they had been able to learn nothing from them. Nor did they dare, in the precarious condition of our fortunes, attempt to find out in any of the

small hamlets we skirted on our journey. The mountain tribes, shy even in so-called times of peace,—for when were the *Indios* ever left in peace?—were now doubly suspicious of strangers. The fear of bandits and spies and pressgangs kept them well away from contact with any whom they did not know.

At last, however, a rumor in some underground way reached the village, and Tezpi came over one evening to acquaint the Padre with it.



## CHAPTER XIV

FROM the kitchen, where I was grinding the new and precious cornmeal for the morning *tortillas*, I could distinguish only the salutations that passed between the Padre, Ramon and Tezpi as he came in at the gate. The harsher voice of Tezpi continued, broken by the slow-spoken words of the Padre, and the eager interrogations of Ramon. Then fell a long interval of silence, and there was wafted to me the fragrance of tobacco. Evidently Tezpi's communication was important, and required thought.

Into this silence fell suddenly Félix's childish treble. "Ramon, I am so sleepy; have you forgotten to put me to bed?"

I rose to get the boy, but had not reached the door of the kitchen when I was arrested by the minor chords of the lullaby which Ramon so often sang to him.

"Sleep, sleep, sleep," sang the voice, but it was the cracked voice of Tezpi, and not that of Ramon.

An exclamation interrupted the singer, followed by excitement in which all three seemed to be talking at once. Félix, forgotten, ran out to me.

"Little mother, come, Ramon is fighting Tezpi, and the Padre, too. Come and stop them."

But there was no fighting to be stopped when I reached the garden. Instead, Ramon, weeping, was locked in Tezpi's arms. The Padre stood in an attitude of blessing above them. He was praying. Confusedly I heard the words, "This my son, which was lost, and is found."

I stood looking for some minutes in astonishment and mute dismay. No one of the group, least of all my brother, noticed me. Unreasoning, a fierce anger swept me. He *was* my brother. Tezpi, Nahua, no one should take him away from me. Yet if he wanted to

go? I stole noiselessly from the room, picked up Félix, and ran out into the night.

Hours later, Ramon found me face downward, sobbing, beside the cataract.

"Little sister?" he said as his foot stumbled against me in the dark. "Ah, I thought I should find you here." He sat down beside me, and tried to lift my head to his lap.

I resisted, refusing to be moved.

"But what is it? I have never seen you like this, Porfiria!"

I made no sign; I could not.

He began again presently, in the even, soothing voice he used to quiet Félix. "Listen, a great joy has come to me. You, with whom I have shared so many sorrows, to whom else should I turn to share this?"

"I was not asked to share it," I muttered.

Perhaps Ramon did not hear me. At any rate, he began softly to stroke my hair and continued:—

"You were too little to remember the day when your father brought me home. But I

can never forget. There were five other children, your brothers and sisters, and you, a baby, in your mother's arms. The hut was small and your father only a fisherman, and poor, as all Indians seem to be. Yet your mother's heart opened when she saw me, lying half drowned and altogether wretched, in your father's arms. She asked no questions, even, but laid you down quickly, and caught me up and warmed me on her heart."

I listened, but what had this to do with the present? I reached over to tuck my *rebozo* more carefully about little Félix, who had fallen asleep beside me.

Ramon noticed the gesture. "Porfiria, even as you care for Félix, I cared for you, when you and I were left with the dear grandparents after you were orphaned. Your people became my people, until gradually I forgot that I had ever had another home. Only the lullaby with which my mother sang me to sleep remained of all my memories, and that because I sang it to you, night after night, beside the lake.



MY MOTHER



To-night I heard that lullaby from other lips for the first time since I was a baby."

He continued talking, but my mind was in a whirl, and the words escaped me, even then. In a flash, I saw the meaning of the scene in the garden from which I had fled, and, not only that, but of the heretofore unintelligible jealousy in my heart. Tezpi was Ramon's father and Nahua his sister. Who, then, was I?

Had I been younger, I would have thrown myself upon Ramon in a passion of grief, and implored him to answer the question. As it was, I gathered myself up in a silent, miserable heap, and made an effort to listen once more.

"Dear Porfiria," he was saying, "I told you that it was a great joy to me to have found my kindred—perhaps, had my mother lived, I might have felt the tie more strongly. But to-night, see, I have come from my father's house to you. How shall I live without you, or apart from you, or not plan for you, my sister, my all?"

Strong emotion swept him, and I in my outer darkness trembled in unison. How indeed should we cease the comradeship of years, or admit to a closer relation those who but yesterday had been as strangers? I could not doubt his suffering. I saw that neither Nahua's beauty, nor Tezpi's authority weighed with Ramon against his attachment to me. Brown, and plain, and destitute as I was, he held me his sister, the child of his benefactors, to whom he was bound by a thousand habitual ties.

For a long time neither of us spoke, but my hand sought his and he held it close.

"I am not unmindful of my duties to my father and to my tribe," Ramon said, at length. "Nor are they unreasonable, but simple and humble, as you know. But I have belonged, heart and soul, to the misfortunes of your people. It was only to-night that Tezpi brought news which, at last, gives me hope that we may yet find Don Luis."

"News of Don Luis, Ramon?"

"Nay, not directly, but of the course of the Revolution. Madero is dead, and a new dictator rules in Mexico. The dungeons of San Juan de Uloa have been opened, and the prisoners released."

"Can it be true?" I questioned, awestruck by the immensity of the possibilities unfolded. For three hundred years the gates of San Juan de Uloa had closed on political suspects as inexorably as those of death itself. By no other avenue could release come to the unhappy souls in it.

"The word was brought by a *bandido* from these parts, who was set free at the time, Tezpi said. To-morrow I shall see the man myself."

How long Ramon and I might have remained talking in the darkness that drew us so close, like the perplexities which surrounded us, I do not know. It was not so much to learn of Ramon's plans, which he himself had not yet made. Unconsciously I clung to these, which proved to be our last moments alone. Even the thought of the Padre did not obtrude.

As if in a dream, far off, I heard the uneasy tumble of the cataract, like the clamor of the outer world that called us.

But Félix, whose sleep was troubled, waked and began to cry. He was cold and uncomfortable, and wanted to be put to bed. I gathered him up and gave him to Ramon. Hand in hand, we walked silently home.

The light which streamed from the cottage showed that the Padre was still up. He met us at the door with an anxious, thoughtful look, But aside from giving us an especially loving blessing, he said nothing, and I passed on at once to my chamber. There, until the dawn broke, I heard Ramon and the Padre talking. At length the voices blurred and blended and became those of the cataract, calling, calling, calling my Ramon away.

When I woke, Ramon had gone. Incredible as it seemed, it was true. He had gone to Mexico, the Padre said, to find Don Luis. The loneliness I felt was a physical sickness. The Padre, even Félix, appeared unreal and

without reason. I had no ears for the Padre's explanation that it was wiser so, and that Ramon had thought to save me pain. I only knew that I, who up till now had been Ramon's comrade and the confidante of all our plans, was suddenly shut out,—not even asked to pack his little bundle for the journey.

I went about the house. There, in his room, was left the sash he ought to have worn; on the loom was a cloak, finished except for the border, which I had intended to have ready for him to wear at the Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe; <sup>96</sup> in the kitchen no breakfast had been made ready, and no food touched.

All day, while the Padre was away at the school, or caring for other community interests, my loneliness increased. Not till then did I realize how much Ramon and I had been together, in our care of each other and of Félix, since our settling in the village. Sometimes it had been only for a snatch of something to eat, or to work in the garden or among the beehives we once more kept, that he appeared, but

sometimes for whole heavenly afternoons he, Félix and I, sat under the trees by the cool cataract while he played his flute, or carved his wonderful violin.

It was there that we remembered together the dangers and sorrows through which we had passed, and spoke bravely of the future, marveling what it might hold in store. What had become of Lola, of Almonte, of Ramon's master, and uppermost always in our thoughts, of Don Luis? Some day, we knew, we must go forth to find the answers. But the time of our going we left to the Padre. That our quest should involve separation, was, to me, a new and terrible thought.

Even less than I had done before Ramon's departure could I bring myself now to mingle with the village girls. I answered when they spoke to me, and went with them when I was asked. But I did not seek them. That they were Ramon's people, and entitled to my interest, the Padre told me again and again. It made no difference. And when Tezpi and





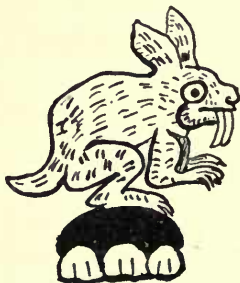
TEZPI AND NAHUA

Nahua coaxed me out and talked to me of Ramon, I answered them at random.

We had in reality only one interest in common, our concern that we had heard no word either of Ramon or of the bandit it was his intention to see when he left. This last, though disquieting, was not unnatural. In our troublous times, when all, the innocent with the guilty, were hunted, wariness was one's best defense. Acting on this theory, the bandit had probably betaken himself to regions even more remote than ours.

As the days dragged by, Félix became my greatest comfort, as he had been at the *hacienda* long before. His little fingers probed my wounds so innocently, and healed them by awakening the happy memories we shared. He felt no aloofness toward any one; how should he whose heart was so full of love? But the village, while it adored him, regarded him as of a different world. This was not due to his parentage, for he was still supposed to be my younger brother, but to the real

nobility of his nature. How shall I describe him? Whether it were his eyes, gray like agates, yet deep as the rippled lake, his gracious mouth, upcurved in laughter or sweetly grave, his thoughtful forehead, his perfect stature, or the spirit that informed all with loveliness,—I know not which were most endearing, or most to be cherished. Could Doña Marina, his mother, have seen him, I think even her heart would have been satisfied. To her and to the Madonna also I prayed for guidance, as I taught him of the beautiful mother who awaited him in heaven. But I sorrowed that here on earth she might not know his love.



## CHAPTER XV

TEZPI, the chief or *alcalde*, of the Tecos village, was also the wise man of the tribe. This was in accordance with the ancient custom of our people, whose king was the high priest as well. Before the time of the *Conquistadores*, before even the Aztecs rose to power in the Valley of Mexico, the Tarascos had governed thousands of leagues of fertile land in the heart of our country. Moctezuma never subdued them to become a part of his empire, nor did the Spaniards ever hold sway over us, though by treachery they killed our king and stole our riches and our lands. Indeed, had it not been for the influence of the Church, we should have had nothing more to do with the enemies of our country.

Thus, at least, Tezpi and the Padre discoursed on the history of our race in the cool

of the evening, beneath the orange trees. A certain Bishop Quiroga was sent by the Spanish king to govern us, after our confidence had been so shamefully abused by his predecessors. He, by means of kindness and justice, induced our ancestors to leave the caves and crags where they had taken refuge from the Spaniards, and to return to their homes. Cities he built and churches, and fostered the native industries, and taught by precept and example the way of Christ.

Once more, then, the Tarascan men took up the crafts for which they had long been famous, the cutting of stone and the working of copper ; and once more their women wove blue cotton stuffs, and lacquered gay dishes of gourds. But the most notable of our arts fell into disuse with the fall of our monarchy. The beautiful embroideries of feather-work, of which the robes of kings and courtiers had been made, were needed no more. Yet the Tarascan merchants, who in those older days had set forth in great companies, and traded

as far as Guatemala on the south and the Rio Grande on the north, still kept up the traditions of their guild. So lately as the Padre's last visit to Huitzitzilin ten years before, they had gone, in smaller bands to be sure, twice a year over the mountains to Mexico City and the coast of the Pacific to market their wares.

"How came it about, Tezpi," I heard the Padre ask one evening, "that these caravans were given up? Was it on account of the war?"

"No, not in the first place," Tezpi replied. "Our misfortunes began with the mildew that rotted our corn six years ago. That was followed by a year of drouth, and then came the war. You remember us as a thrifty tribe, owning cattle and horses, and tilling many upland ranches, besides our village lands. Last fall, when we went to the mountain," his eyes sought the ground in momentary shame,—“it was to pray to the God for our very lives. We had no longer horses, cattle, or corn, nor hope left in our hearts.”

"Hope was what you most needed, Tezpi," said the Padre, looking out over the fertile glade where water brought from the cataract rendered the disaster of another drouth impossible. "Here were you starving in the midst of plenty. It is but another picture of your unhappy country, so blessed by God with all riches, and so accursed by man that you have no longer the eyes to see, nor the will to use, his gifts!"

That the soul and genius of our downtrodden race should not die, but live, revivifying Mexico, I had long since learned was the purpose of all Padre Francisco's endeavors. If he could rouse to life a spirit of honor and independence, even in this small corner of our country, he would be following in the footsteps of Hidalgo and Quiroga and undoing, to the measure of his ability, the wrongs inflicted by the tyranny of church and state. Thus it came about that he seemed to take less interest than formerly in the course of outward events, and threw all his energy into the task

which he had set himself. Now that Ramon was gone, there was more need of finding wholesome employment for the young men of the village, who missed his leadership.

The Padre therefore determined to revive the dyeing industry for which the hamlet had once been famous. Because of our own wars and, as we had already learned in Lerma, of the wars in Europe, the foreign-made chemical dyes were no longer obtainable. This presented an unusually good opportunity for our stuffs, could they be transported to market. Fields were again planted with indigo, and old men taught the younger ones their cultivation and the making of the dye. The revival of the dyeing meant a corresponding stimulus among the women in weaving. From forgotten corners old patterns were brought out to be copied. Cotton fields vied with indigo fields in luxuriance. That winter almost the entire yield of cotton was made up in blue and white. There was cloth by the yard, coarse for skirts, and finer for waists. But the pride

of the village went into the making of *rebozos*, with diapered borders, and curiously knotted fringes.

We had sheep also in our district, and the Padre saw to it that they had good pasturage and water, to improve their coats. This wool, when carded and spun, was also dyed and woven into blankets and *tilmas*, as the short cloaks of the men were called.

Every one, it seemed, who was not engaged in these various processes, was busy manufacturing *gicaras*.<sup>97</sup> These were dishes, of varying sizes, made from calabash gourds. The gourds, when dried, were lacquered in red and inlaid in blue in designs of birds and flowers. Very gay they were in appearance, and durable also. All our table dishes, including ladles and cups, were made of this ware.

Gradually, a sort of trade was built up between our village and other hamlets similarly hidden among the mountains, the Padre usually accompanying the men chosen to market

our commodities. But as he went to and fro with them, he came home with tales of misery and hopelessness that wrung his heart. Except for one or two villages where thrift and sobriety ruled, all were in the condition of shiftless starvation in which we had found Huitzitzilin when we first came to it. But seeing the benefits of our industry, and hearing the Padre or Tezpi in the market places exhort to better living, made its impression. The villages began to send delegations to the Padre imploring that he come and teach them in turn.

Doubtless Padre Francisco would have acceded to some of these demands, had it not been for Félix and me. Many a time I saw him regard us with troubled eyes, his soul yearning for the wider usefulness to which, without thought of personal comfort or safety, he longed to give himself. Yet Félix he held as a dying charge from Doña Marina, his benefactress, and me he ever regarded as the al-

most miraculous preserver of his life. He could not leave us, even with Tezpi, and go in peace.

Therefore, with Tezpi's consent, he portioned out among these communities, men of our village, strong of character, to live there with their families and, as he put it in his special service when he sent them forth, "to be a light in a dark place." To the communities in need of it, were sent also quotas of seed corn. Thus it came about that in a year's time, our village developed a spiritual and material leadership among the mountains, for several leagues around. Gradually each village, fostered in this way in its native resources, whether the making of potteries, the tilling of corn, or the raising of sheep, and quickened in spirit, sought counsel not only from the Padre, but from Tezpi as well.

It must not be supposed, however, that this development was entirely tranquil, though among the villagers themselves there were few enmities. Whatever disputes arose, were set-

tled immediately the Padre appeared. All loved him and looked up to him, understanding to a greater or less degree that he loved them enough to give his life, as he was doing, for their betterment. "Greater love hath no man than this," he preached. They looked at his shining face, caught his inspiration, and followed humbly where he led.

But the increasing turbulence of the times, though we were neither prosperous nor numerous enough to be drawn from our out-of-the-way corner into any of the factions fighting for power, was manifest in growing lawlessness throughout the mountains. In the quick succession of governments in Mexico, and the rise and fall of their adherents, our very inaccessibility invited refugees, even as it had invited us. The bandit who had escaped from San Juan de Uloa was but the first of numbers seeking asylum. Sometimes they were only the straggling remnants of a village looted, because it lay in the path of contending forces; sometimes they were the looters themselves,

recuperating on their way to richer prizes. At other times the stranger in our midst proved to be a deserting soldier, or a hunted political chief. From all except those in distress, both the hereditary instinct of the Indians and the counsel of the Padre, held us aloof. Each village posted sentries and sent the word of such arrivals on from one to another, either by couriers, or by signal fires. If the visitors seemed likely to pass near any habitation, the women and children were secreted and the flocks driven to safe shelters. But the men, for the Tarascos are as brave now as in the days of our last *Calzontzin*,<sup>98</sup> remained to protect their property, if need be, with their lives.

Undoubtedly this intrepidity saved us from the attacks of our frequently unwelcome guests. But the total absence of roads, and the inaccessibility of our villages were our chief protection. Thus we in Huitzitzilin had seen only the bandit, of all those of whom we had been warned.

The Padre, going from village to village, on donkey-back or on foot, was naturally far more exposed than we. Nor was there in those days protection in the habit of priest or nun. Those who were most ardent for liberty, were most bitter against the Church for its abuses. I was full of anxiety, therefore, on his account. To add to my concern, he made light of the danger, and even courted for himself the contact he advised against for others, in the hope of gleaning information of the outside world.

These chance encounters of his had been fruitful of many startling disclosures, and, so far, of no ill. The news of the fall of President Madero was followed by intelligence of the fall of his successor. A certain Carranza, a lawyer, the Padre learned, was now in power, and most significant of the temper of his rule, had abolished the office of *jefe político*. I can well remember the Padre's excitement when he came home with this news.

"Porfiria," said he, "mark my words. No more important event has happened in the his-

tory of your country these thirty years. With every upheaval we have had the same watchword: Land for the *peones*, but each time it has proved a mirage above the limitless desert of oppression and injustice. Here, by contrast, is a deed. What will it not mean to be free of the espionage of an agent paid by and responsible only to the oppressor? Justice is beginning. Would to God that it might have come earlier, to save us all."

He relapsed into silence, and I knew he was thinking of Doña Marina and her terrible fate. He had not forgotten: I began to see that, for all his preoccupation which left me doubly lonely, the misfortunes of the *hacienda* were still the mainsprings of his activities.

That night his hand rested with added kindness upon my head. "Courage, Porfiria; we shall yet hear of Ramon and Don Luis. God is working out his own plan for them and for us." He stood for some minutes looking at me and at little Félix, whom I had just tucked into bed. Then, with a quick motion, he

brushed the hair from my forehead, and stooped and kissed it. "Never think, child, that I do not understand your heartache. I also pray for Ramon."



## CHAPTER XVI

**S**OFTENED by Padre Francisco's sympathy, I began to take a more normal and human interest in our surroundings. It no longer seemed unbearable to me to listen of an evening in the plaza to the music which Félix so loved. What if Ramon were not in his accustomed place? The music, at least, was his! A message, almost, it seemed from him to me. And when Nahua joined me, timidly at first, and walked with us beneath the limes, I found that the praise of Ramon sounded sweet to me, even from her lips. After all, she was only half-sister to Ramon, her mother belonging to an entirely different tribe. Thus she seemed, to my mind, to have a less direct claim upon him. My love, almost against my will, responded to hers, and again I went with her to the woods and the fields.

But it was little five-year-old Félix who

brought my numb heart back to life. How really lonely he was! I did not realize it until one day I heard him talking to some children who lived at the lower end of the village. They belonged to a shiftless group of families that had not profited by Padre Francisco's teaching nor the example of our neighbors. Yet the children, who had nothing lovely at home, had a love of beauty which brought them often to our garden, with its wealth of blossoms and flitting humming-birds. There they clustered about the gate, and with their wistful glances, begged for flowers.

We had now come to Holy Week, and there had been much talk of decorating the altars in the church for the Easter services. Birds were to be used likewise; and Félix already had a dozen cages of humming-birds, mocking birds, song sparrows and thrushes which he and I had snared. These were to be kept till Easter morning, when they were all to be set free among the flowers in the church. Every one in the village, and in the villages round

about, had been urged by the Padre to bring an offering of birds or flowers. The service was their service, and thus they could take part in it.

But the poor "little shameless ones," as Félix called our ragged children, what could they bring? Some such thought must have been in his mind on the Saturday of Glory when I heard him, in his sweet voice, ask the children in. There were perhaps a dozen of them, as I could see from the porch where I was setting the last stitches in the embroidery of my holiday chemise. With childish dignity, he showed them everything: the bees in their neat hives beneath the myrtle trees; the birds in cages hung among the cool, green orange leaves; and the flowers, roses, violets, lilies, Virgin's Mantles, and a score of others, which made our little yard a paradise of scent and color. For each child he picked a bouquet, prattling the while of "the little San Francisco," who so loved the children, the birds, and the flowers.

"And who is he?" I heard one urchin ask.

Félix stopped in amazement. "Have you never heard my Padre in the church?" His glance went from one to another.

Most of the children shook their heads.

"But see then, that is why you are so poor and so dirty. Come with me, and I will tell you of him."

At that moment, a message was brought from Nahua, asking me to help her in making the church ready for the festival, and I went.

When I returned, some two hours later, Félix was not in the garden. Evidently the children had coaxed him away. At last I found him, beside the path the goatherds traveled to the mountain pastures. He was seated with his back to me, and in a circle about him were not only the ragged children he had befriended, but perhaps a score more, drinking in the story he was telling. So pretty a picture as they made on the greensward in the flecked light and shadow cast by a mighty oak tree,

Félix expounding, and they listening, I have never seen.

I stole up quietly behind him. He was still talking of St. Francis of Assisi, the Padre's patron saint, for I heard him say: "But he said, 'Little brother bird, do not be frightened. I will save you from the cruel boys.'"

It seemed a pity to interrupt him. Yet I could see that his cheeks were flushed, and feared lest the unusual excitement make him ill. So I spoke:

"Good morning, Don Félix, and do you not think it is time you came home?"

He sprang to his feet, quite embarrassed, both because he had run away, and because I had come upon him there, before all his new friends. "Oh, mother, little mother," he cried—for such he always called me—"how long a time you have been gone!"

After that day, Félix would never allow "his children" to be called shameless. Nor, in fact, did they deserve that title long.

On Easter Sunday, in the clean, flower-gar-

landed church, I looked about among the shining faces of the congregation who had come, some of them, as far as ten leagues to be present at the commemoration of the Rising of our Lord. The contrast between them, bright-eyed, neatly dressed, decorous, and the half-clad, dirty villagers who had gathered in this same church only a year and a half before to hear the Padre's first sermon, was unbelievable. And when the black curtain was drawn back from the high altar, and the birds soared, singing, out of sight, I thought that the text of his sermon on that day had come true. We had a song in the night, and gladness of heart in these, our mountains of the Lord.

But what, I considered disquietedly, had I done to bring this change about? What could I do, now that I had become almost a woman, in my fourteenth year? I longed to rise also, from the place of sorrow I had made myself in my grieving for Ramon. Here in this consecrated place of hope, I felt suddenly sure that he would return. How should I retrieve my in-

difference, and make myself worthy of him when he came?

In a dark corner of the church, my eyes fell upon Félix's dirty little comrades. Evidently no mother's hand had washed their faces, nor clothed them for the day. But each had made pitiful efforts at improvement, and each wore a wreath of flowers. Of their own accord, they had come for the first time to church. A lump rose in my throat. The Lord had answered my prayer, I thought, and here was the mission given to me.

That very afternoon, I began by visiting the cheerless group of homes which was such a blot on our village. Félix went with me, radiant with delight at my plan. Together we asked permission of the fathers and mothers to take the children with us each fair day, up by the cataract. Whether any would have responded to me, I know not, but in not one of the four homes was there any who failed to be won by Félix's plea, "Please let them come and play with me."

Every morning until the rainy season in June they came, twenty of them, in ages ranging from four to eight, and I taught them. Yet I doubt if they knew they were being taught. One day was swimming day in a quiet pool; another time we gathered wild flowers and named them; or again I told them stories. But the effect was magical. Though years of neglect prevented their minds from developing, as it did their little garden plots from blooming with the luxuriance of ours, by summer a beginning had been made.

Padre Francisco, all this time, was going through a period of great disappointment in the larger development of his villages. He had hoped much from Carranza's rise to power. But instead, he learned from this refugee or that that the generals of his army had fallen to disputing among themselves. In the very month of Easter, the city of Lerma had been carried by storm by one of these generals; and a little later Mexico City was taken by another, a former bandit from the south. Anarchy

ruled, he told me sadly, throughout the country.

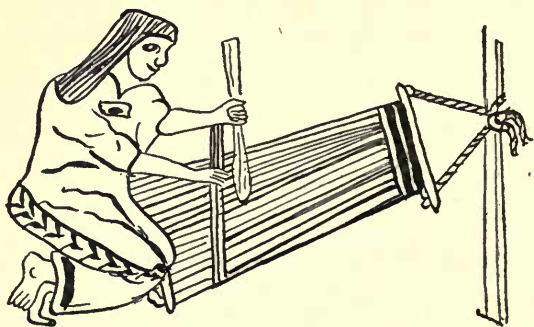
This anarchy was manifested, as I have said, in the increasing number of refugees among our mountains. Watch fires and couriers bringing warnings became more frequent and we lived in a state of unrest, though as yet neither we nor our property had suffered. But the Padre, who had planned to resume the custom of taking merchandise to the City of Mexico for sale, realized that this was impossible at present. Even could our merchants get through, the direst want prevailed there, in the very center of all the revolutions.

Among ourselves, though, thanks to the Padre's forethought, barter really increased our prosperity to a pitch the mountain Indians had never before enjoyed, there was disquiet owing to this very fact. Ambition was aroused, and now and again some of the younger men broke away to join one faction or the other in the civil war. In fact, messengers began to come to us from our neigh-

bors to the south, who were fighting under Zapata, an outlawed Indian farmer. He it was to whom the City of Mexico had recently fallen. His forces were made up of mountain Indians, like ourselves, who were fighting for the lands from which they had been unlawfully evicted. Their appeal, therefore, struck a responsive chord in our hearts, and one to which, but for the Padre, our villages would all have responded to a man.

“But why?” I often heard the Padre reason with Tezpi or the other chiefs, who were fired by the eloquence of the southerners and longing to fight, “Why should you leave your homes, and wives and children, and lay down your lives? For what? Have you not here your lands, and even a measure of security such as exists perhaps nowhere else? For whom will you give them up? It is Carranza, or Zapata, or Villa, stained with murders, who will be your savior thus at the price of blood and countless villainies? Which of them, fair in promise, will you trust?”

“My friends, look about you and be content. Behold in me, if you will, one whom God hath sent to lead you in peaceful ways to that same end of which they speak. If we, in this corner of your country, can work out your independence and livelihood, by so much is the general orderliness of the country effected. Let us be exemplars, if we cannot yet be messengers, of peace.”



## CHAPTER XVII

**B**UT the war to which we did not go, was destined to come to us. It was in the early part of June and the feast of Corpus Christi was at hand. Either for this reason, or because they had become accustomed to alarms, the sentries grew lax. Without warning of any kind, a cavalcade of a hundred horsemen came riding down the glen one day. Almost before I was aware of their approach, for the horses were unshod, they were full upon me and my little band of children at the cataract.

The children scattered, taking to the woods like rabbits, or running toward the village as fast as their legs would carry them. But I had a hopeless feeling that flight was impossible for me. Besides, by holding the band in parley, I should gain time for the children to

alarm the villagers below. Félix was with me, and holding him tightly by the hand, I awaited the nearer approach of the band. The little *barranca* was so narrow that they came on in single file, their leader at their head. Yet even so they made a formidable appearance, each trooper heavily armed with cartridge belts, a musket slung on his back, and a revolver in his hand. As I watched, something familiar in the gait of the leader's black horse caught my eye. The toss of his head, the quickly pointed ears, the daintily planted hoofs,—did I not know them all? Almost within reach of my hand, the rider pulled up sharply.

At the same instant Mogul recognized me. His glad whinny resounded above the roar of the cataract, and he fretted frantically at the bit. His master, utterly nonplussed by the horse's behavior, so at variance with his usual docility, and alive to the dangers of the awakened echoes, raised his whip to strike. Were Mogul to leap forward under that impulse, Félix and I would be brushed over the

precipice into the foaming water far below. I sprang to his head. The whip descended. Mogul cowered, but his hoofs moved not an inch.

From my position, almost beneath his quivering body, my eyes looked straight into those of his rider. The heavy *sombrero* he wore no longer hid his features from me. Ramon's master, the music-maker of Lerma, looked down at me.

"Señor Perez!" I exclaimed.

He was even more astonished than I, for of course he did not recognize me, whom he had seen but once at the *hacienda* on the memorable evening when I had brought out Ramon's flutes at his request.

"I am Ramon's sister," I hurried on, "and this—" But I stopped just in time, before revealing Félix's identity. How did I know what party Señor Perez might now belong to, what were his intentions, or whether he still entertained friendly feelings toward the boy who had repaid his kindness by running away?

“Ramon’s sister—here! And where is Ramon?”

I was greatly relieved to see the look of genuine kindness that came into his eyes.

“He is gone these six months in quest of Don Luis.”

“H’m—the same quest which took him from me,—as I supposed. But he should have trusted me,—his ingratitude cut me to the heart, for I was fond of the lad.”

“But, Señor, it was to save you from danger. All this the Padre can explain to you better than I.”

“The Padre?”

“Padre Francisco, whom you doubtless remember; he who was the father of all the Indians at the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos. He is now in the village down yonder.”

Señor Perez deliberated in silence for a moment, then turned in his saddle and spoke rapidly to the man behind him.

Mogul meantime used his slackened rein to

feel me all over with his velvet nose. But if he were disappointed at not finding any sugar cane, he did not show it. His delight in me seemed almost as human as mine in him.

"Look you, girl," Señor Perez, concluding his parley, gathered up the reins. "Go and bring this Padre Francisco to me. We will await you in the little glade which I see opening out ahead."

I picked up Félix and ran, nor did I stop until, breathless, I burst into the group of men who had gathered about the church. Evidently the children had spread the tidings of threatened invasion. The men were armed with *machetes*, bows and arrows, clubs, and some few with pistols. Our guns were no longer of any use, since no powder could be obtained. These details I noted, in quick contrast with the well armed horsemen who were waiting my return.

"The Padre, where is he?" I gasped. A lane was opened for me directly to the church

steps where he stood. It took only a few moments to acquaint him with what had happened.

He considered swiftly, his eyes on Félix. "We will leave him here," he said. "Félix, go to Tezpi. Tezpi, hide this child and guard him with your life. This may be my last charge to you. Let it be your first concern." From his breast he took a packet. "Keep this also; it is his."

It was no time for farewells. With neither backward look nor thought, I led the way to the glen.

There we found the troopers had dismounted. Some stood guard with the horses; others occupied the steep slopes from which they commanded all approaches. The Padre stepped forward fearlessly, and Señor Perez, doffing his hat, invited him to be seated on a mossy bank which formed a natural seat.

As for me, who could be of no further use, I fled from the curious glances of the soldiers, back to Tezpi and Félix in the church.

It was perhaps an hour later that the Padre returned, bringing with him the whole company. Two and two, with led horses they walked, the Padre and Señor Perez at the head. To Tezpi and the waiting Indians, this peaceful conclusion of the conference was not a surprise. Scouts, noiseless and invisible to the invaders, had already brought word of the approaching cavalcade. When the two bands of men came within speaking distance, the Padre stepped forth. In a few words he explained to the villagers that Señor Perez, and all whom he befriended, were his friends; that, driven from Lerma by those who had captured the city, they were on their way to join their loyal comrades of the Carranza army, to which after the fall of Madero so many of the more moderate revolutionists had turned, in the City of Mexico.

"But," he continued, "having heard from me of the fall of that city also they ask permission to tarry with us until better news shall come. These, also, *Capitán*," he turned to the

officer and indicated the Indians with a protecting gesture, "these also are my friends, and this," beckoning Tezpi forward, "is the father of Ramon. My friend, behold in Señor Perez the benefactor of your son."

The rejoicing of the village in this announcement of the double bond between them and the strangers knew no bounds. Messengers quickly recalled the women and children, and others swift of foot ran with words of peace to each village within our confederation. That night a celebration rivaling that of the anticipated Corpus Christi took place in our midst. We killed of our best, and a great feast was held, followed by music and dancing till the dawn.

In the succeeding weeks, Señor Perez's troop, for our better protection and their greater comfort, was portioned out among the different villages. The soldiers were glad to relieve our men of sentry duty, and altogether by reason of their fast horses and superior equipment for fighting, gave us a real security such as we had

not before enjoyed. But Señor Perez himself and a dozen of his men remained with us.

Naturally, the Padre and I were most anxious for news from Lerma and the surrounding country. This, Señor Perez, who had Ramon's room in our own house, was only too willing to give. It seemed that he and his company had been actually quartered at the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos two months before, scouting and awaiting the advance of the enemy. The *Casa Grande*, though ruinous, he told us, was still habitable, and the estate producing in wild luxuriance. No one had attempted to administer it since its confiscation by the Madero government, acting through the *jefe político* in connection with the raid. The *peones*, however, until this most recent disturbance, had continued on in their various villages, and tilled an increasing hectarage of land for their own use.

The Village of the Shield also had been inhabited, he thought by the remnant of the tribe.

"And what of the *administrador*?" the Padre asked. "Did he then reap no profit from his infamy?"

"Only for the period of his brief triumph among us in Lerma," Señor Perez answered. "Had I known sooner of his evil character, his fall would have been even more swift. But after Madero's government went to pieces, he vanished, leaving his friend the *jefe* to pay for the misdemeanors of both.

"The *jefe*? He was sent to San Juan de Uloa. What became of him after the opening of the prison, I do not know, any more than I know what became of our friend Don Luis whom he, God reward him, had, as I now know, sent to that vile hole."

"Did you know Lola?" I ventured to ask.

"Yes; any that knew Almonte knew her also, who presided at many of the drunken banquets he gave. I thought I saw her the day I left Lerma. She has become a *soldadera*,<sup>99</sup> following the army. It seemed to me I recognized her among the other women riding on the

top of a slow-moving freight train which brought the last reinforcements to the enemy, before I succeeded in blowing up the bridge across the river. The sight of her made me think that Almonte could not be far off."

Sad though his news made us, for he told also of the terrible devastation caused by the most recent occupation of the city, of starvation, pillage and murder through all the countryside, yet certainty of any kind was welcome in place of conjecture. We grieved more that he could bring us no word of Ramon or of Don Luis than for any other cause. But, day by day, as he unfolded the distressing conditions which prevailed around us, we grew increasingly thankful for the safe retreat a merciful Providence had provided for us. I know not how it was with the Padre, but I grew more anxious about the fate of our loved ones, kept far from us, somewhere in the turmoil of the war.

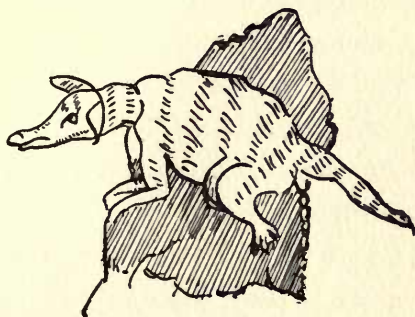
Señor Perez was not inactive in trying to secure information as to the course of the revo-

lution. From time to time his scouts brought news that was more promising of settled government. At length word came that Mexico City had passed again from the hands of Zapata's Indians into those of Carranza. This was the event for which Señor Perez had long waited. Yet strangely enough, he seemed in no great haste to depart.

His reluctance was the more irritating to me, because he had spoken time and again not only of his eagerness to fight once more for the First Chief, as Carranza was called, but to seek and find Don Luis and Ramon. I could not understand an impatience that brooked delay, until on the eve of his departure, I happened to see him with Nahua. Their attitude, the pain on their faces, told its own story. They loved each other, and they were saying good-by. I stole away, my heart torn between their happiness and their grief.

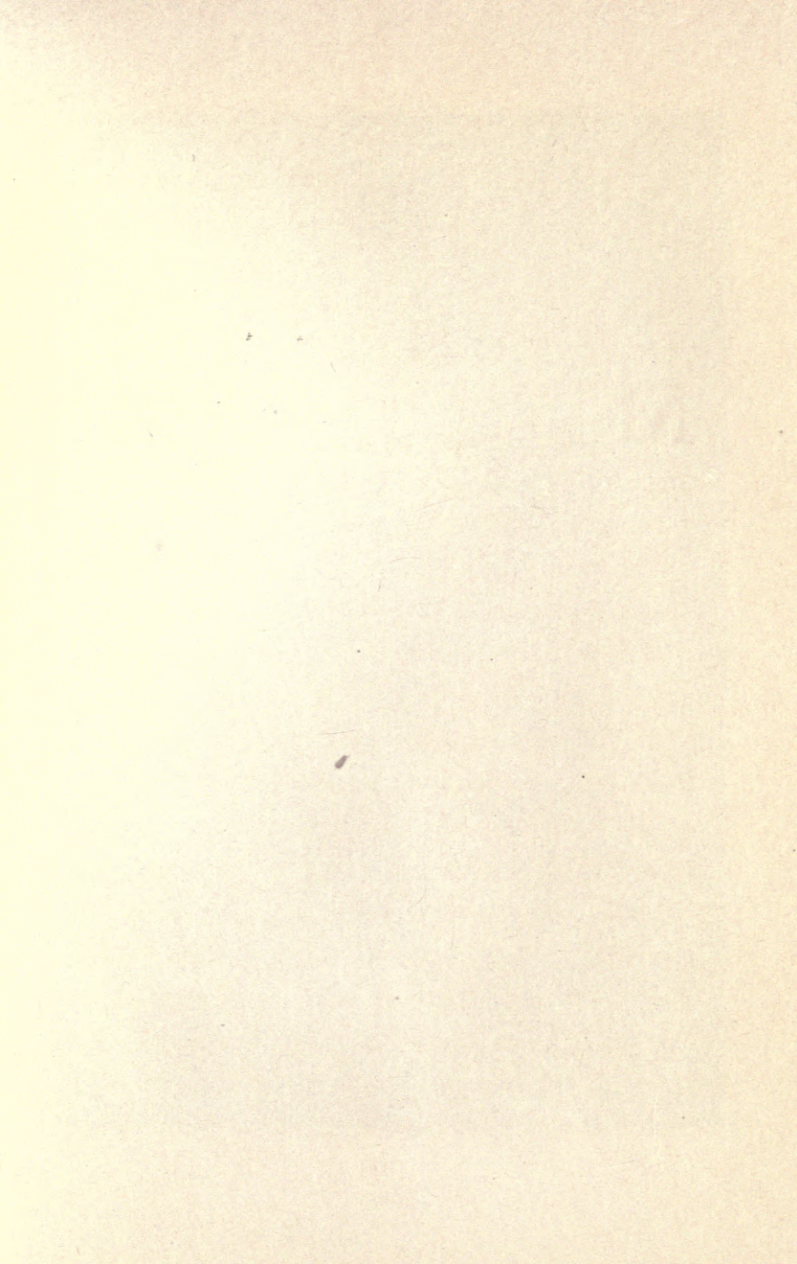
But Señor Perez was not the only one who left his heart among us that summer. Fully a third of his troopers, most of whom were,

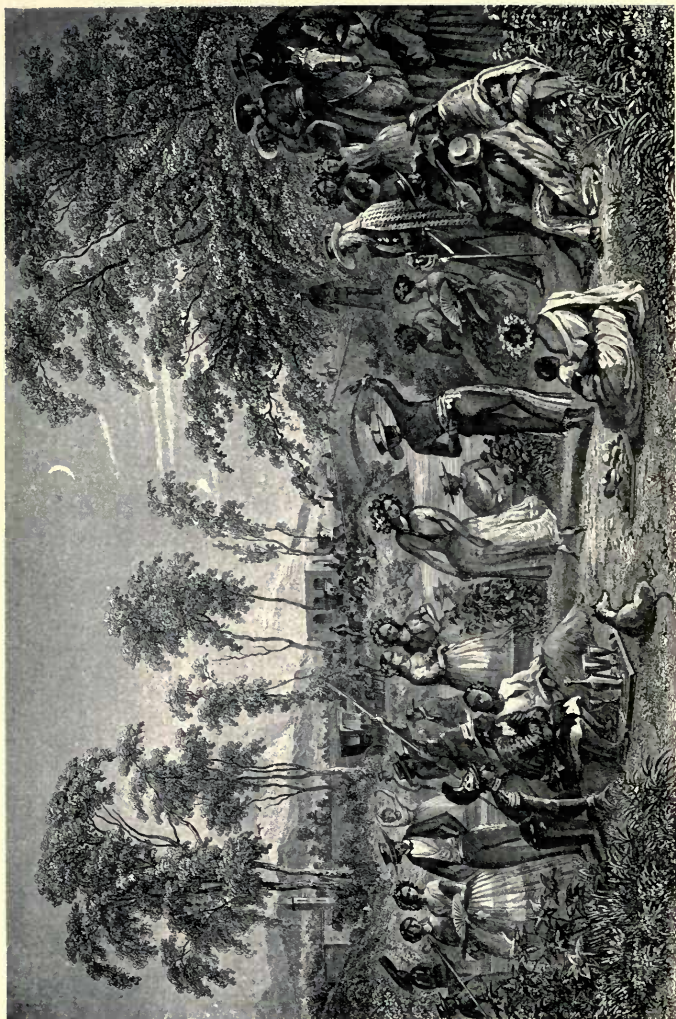
like himself, half Indian and half Spanish, remained behind, making their homes in our various villages with the maidens they had won. Señor Perez himself had encouraged them in doing this, seeing the farsightedness of the Padre's policy of aloofness from the political conflict, and lending thus the only help in his power to protect us in our rights.



## CHAPTER XVIII

**M**ONTHS of blank uncertainty again closed about us after *el Capitán* Perez and his troopers rode away. The Indians from the south, defeated, no longer seemed able to reach us, and from the north came no more refugees. The Padre argued that this inactivity within the mountains meant a more settled state of government without. And, in fact, the meager information which our scouts picked up confirmed this conjecture. Lerma, as well as Mexico City, they reported, was now held by Carranza. Yet if all were peaceful once more, surely Señor Perez would be the first to hasten to us with the glad news. The truth was, fighting, desperate fighting, still continued; but the scene of it had shifted to other territories far removed from us. There the decision as to who should rule over the





AT THE CLOSE OF THE WAR

ruins of our land hung on the outcome of battles still unfought.

Undoubtedly the time passed heavily for Nahua, deprived at its very dawning, of her happiness. I could see how anxiety wore on her fragile beauty, giving depth to her blue eyes and maturity to her face. In a new-found comradeship, for the most part unspoken, we worked together in church and village or walked in the fields which held so many memories for us both. But to her, inevitably, each day brought its hope. Señor Perez, young, confident, and secure in the favor of his chief, how should he not come riding once more down the glen at the close of the war to claim her and take her away with him to the gay scenes he had pictured in Lerma and in the City of Mexico?

I, on the other hand, in the calm of a hope so long deferred that it bordered on despair, felt in comparatively trivial ways, yet sharply, the loss of *el Capitán*. The music he drew from Ramon's violin of an evening, the praise

of Ramon's genius, even the inarticulate caresses of Mogul,—I had not realized till they were gone what comfort I had derived from them. Like reflections in a pool, stirred by a passing breeze, they stirred in my heart the image of Ramon.

It was fortunate for me at this time that Félix required so much of my attention. His mind was unusually active for his years, and the Padre decided that he ought to have regular lessons. And though he could have given this instruction himself far better than I, he proposed that I should do it. I, divining why he laid this task upon me, marveled at his wisdom and blessed him in my heart.

So it came about that Nahua, as was indeed fitting, replaced me in many of the village activities. The school which the Padre had started, received fresh impetus from her and from the young men of the Captain's troop, more or less educated, who had cast in their lot with us. In my care was left only the primary class I had started with the children of Félix's

age. These, through the colder winter months, I gathered about me in Ramon's empty room.

The season of Easter, with its bustle of preparation, was once more upon us. One noon, at the close of school, I lingered behind my little pupils, erasing the day's lessons from the home-made blackboards which served us in place of books. My back was turned to the door, when I became aware that some one had entered the room. Thinking it was the Padre, who often stopped to look in upon me, I did not even turn around.

Suddenly some one spoke my name: "Porfiria, *hermanita!*" That voice? Those words? Only one person in the world could speak them. But I, who would have given my life to hear them in the long, long months of waiting, swooned away at the sound.

When I came to myself, it was to find the Padre, as well as Ramon, bending over me. To me it seemed like heaven. I put out my hand timidly and touched Ramon's. The grip

with which his closed over it reassured me. But for my happiness, I could have cried out with pain.

"Are you better?" he inquired anxiously. "How stupid of me to have startled you so. And yet," he ended happily, "how else should I have come? I could not wait."

How could I help being better under that best of physicians, joy itself? The Padre, his eyes twinkling through tears, laughed with a lightheartedness I had not heard since our old, peaceful days at the *hacienda*. A shout from the doorway told that Félix had recognized the stranger who was causing such a commotion. In another instant, he was riding wildly around the room on Ramon's shoulder, and having all he could do to keep his seat.

"But tell us," the Padre said when our delight had somewhat abated, and we were seated at dinner on the porch, "how did you steal such a march on us, and whence do you come?"

"As to the first question, I came down the glen. There was no one in sight, and ours be-

ing the first house, I naturally entered. And as to the second, I rode from Lerma with a party of horsemen who must be even yet waiting my return up in the mountains. I charged them on no account to approach the village till I came back; for, to tell the truth, I had it in mind to surprise you. After so long a wandering, I could not forego that small reward. They have enough to eat," he added, "and they can wait."

"From Lerma, then, you—"

"Yes, I have much to tell you." His face became grave. He had aged, it seemed to me, ten years. "Don Luis is there."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the Padre.

"Yes, I found him, but he is ill—a broken man. You remember, Father, the night I left to find the *bandido*? That man," Ramon shuddered, "proved to be the *jefe político* of Lerma, the same who betrayed our village, connived at the murder of Doña Marina, and sent Don Luis to what he thought was certain death. He had been an outlaw in these moun-

tains before Diaz bought him off with an office, as his custom was. You have all heard of Moldavo, the cutthroat who terrorized the passes toward Mexico twenty years ago,—perhaps you knew, Padre, that the *jefe* was that man.

“It must have been a bitter blow to him to follow not only Don Luis, but such of his other victims as still lived, to the dungeons of San Juan. His chattering teeth and rolling eyes as I questioned him about his fellow prisoners attested his abhorrence of the place. *Caramba!* I had all I could do to keep my hands from his lying throat and ending him then and there!

“But at least, I thought, I would first make sure that he told the truth about Don Luis, who, he said, was still alive at the opening of the prison. I struck a bargain with the wretch, to take me down to the coast by the paths he knew. That was a loathsome comradeship in which my only security was my right hand, and my nerve, not shaken as his was

by the horrors through which he had passed. And in the end I learned little more of Don Luis than he had told me,—and was sold in my turn by him to one of the pressgangs that infested Mexico City. A blow on the head, unconsciousness,—and the next morning I was a soldier on board an insurgent troop train bound for the north.

“You can imagine my anguish, trapped into fighting for a cause I did not understand and had every reason, from my own personal experience, to loathe, and unable to continue the search for my dear patron. But heaven gave me one compensation; with my own hands, I later sent the *jefe* to his last account. That happened in Mexico City a year ago. He was fighting for Zapata, I by that time for Carranza. It did not matter so much to me that I was taken prisoner by Zapata’s victorious army, so long as I had rid the world of him. In truth, I found the southern Indians kindly disposed, in great contrast to the ferocity of the contending armies in the north. I was

wounded and they cared for me, until the fortunes of war, favoring Carranza, swept them out of the city. Me, with the other wounded, they left behind.

"Had it not been for Señor Perez's arrival shortly after, I know not how it might have fared with me. But he had me placed in a hospital. And there it was, when my fever abated, that I discovered Don Luis.

"There lay in a cot near mine an old man, white haired and wasted by disease. As I became partly conscious of my surroundings, I was often annoyed by his ravings, which merged from time to time into my own fevered dreams. I grew better, but he continued in the same unhappy state. One morning I found myself listening to him intelligently. 'Marina, my Marina,' he kept repeating; then wildly, 'Félix, where are you? O my son!'

"No wonder the sounds had blended with my own anguish. I turned my head and saw in that old, tossing form the ruin of what Don Luis had been.

“What might have been a relapse from the shock of this discovery, I think I prevented by sheer force of will. I knew I must keep my senses, and I did. When *el Capitán* Perez came at my summons, he was as thankful as I. That same day, he had us both removed to a quiet house, and from there, as soon as Don Luis was able, we brought him to Lerma with us.”

Ramon paused, and for a space no one spoke. The terrible story he had told was to us, to whom he was so dear, the most realistic picture we could have had of the brutal struggles from which he had thus hardly escaped. Félix crept close to me, and I to Ramon. Only by such nearness could I endure the suspense, or convince myself that he had escaped.

“But is Don Luis recovered?” questioned the Padre.

“He has, in so far that his mind is now clear. But his body is crushed with weakness, and his heart,—only little Félix here can heal that. He is counting the minutes until we return.”

I can well remember—I shall never forget—how Ramon's last words, so simple and altogether to be expected, opened a gulf beneath my feet. In my dreams of his homecoming, my attitude had still been that of a child. I had not reasoned that the event would destroy once more the continuity of our lives, or break up the circle which adversity had welded about us. At a touch, disintegration threatened. Ramon, the Padre, Félix, each had a destiny apart from mine. I held Félix tightly, so tightly that it hurt him. He and all my dear ones, whose pleasure it had been mine to serve, soon, I felt, they would slip away from me, and need me no more.

. . . . .

But now, six months later, I can only pray for forgiveness for the blind selfishness which, even had my fears been realized, ought never to have dimmed my happiness. As I look out to-day from the balcony of the *hacienda*, the hardy Virgin's Mantles which wreath its crumbling pillars, frame once more the placid

reaches of the lake. Down on the shore, the Village of the Shield, but a tinier village than I used to know, nestles in the shelter of the fire-gutted Church. The Señorita's garden stretches at my feet, a tangle of dry weeds; and beyond the broken walls the Hacienda de los Pajaritos Santos lies waste. Yet on the instant, the long *sala* behind me reëchoes with laughter; the bass voice of Don Luis, answered by a child's clear treble. Evidently Félix has been playing one of his merry pranks.

But I will not go in to join them just yet. Coming down the road from Lerma I see the cloud of dust for which I have been waiting all the long afternoon. It is Mogul and a troop of horsemen bringing Ramon from his duties in the city, to spend the blessed Sabbath with me. He will have news of his sister, Nahua, now married to our new Governor, Señor Perez. Perhaps he will also carry a letter from the Padre, who writes us often from his parish among the Tecos Indians, whom he felt he could not leave. Best of all,

he brings me himself, for he has told me that he belongs to me.

Whatever befall in our future,—and the political clouds lift only to gather more darkly about us,—my part in it is assured. It may be we shall remain with Don Luis, who wishes Ramon to help him in portioning out his vast estate among the pitiful remnant of his Indians. It may be Señor Perez is right in thinking that Ramon's world will eventually be that of music. Or his own inclination may lead him back among his people, to take his father's place.

But what if his destiny were even higher than any of these? There lives an old saying among my people, that the deliverer of Mexico will arise from the Tarascan race. What if my Ramon were he? Yet as I hope, I also pray. May the good God shield him from the fate of Hidalgo, and that of all men of blood, and turn our Cry of Sorrow into a song of joy! This at least I know: Wherever Ramon is, I shall be also. That I have promised him.



THE END



THE END



## NOTES



## NOTES

- No. 1. Colima:*—A volcano in the State of Jalisco. It is 12,278 feet high, and beautiful in outline.
- No. 2. Milpa:*—A cornfield.
- No. 3. Pescados blancos:*—White fish.
- No. 4. Tortillas:*—Flat cakes, like pancakes, made of corn meal.
- No. 5. Manta:*—Literally, blanket, but used in Mexico to designate the coarse white cotton from which the trousers and coats of the *peones* are made.
- No. 6. Petates:*—A *petate* is a mat woven, in most cases, of palm leaf.
- No. 7. Skep:*—A conical hive of straw.
- No. 8. Cacique:*—The Spanish form of the Indian word for chief.
- No. 9. Pobrecita:*—A diminutive, meaning poor little thing.
- No. 10. Tarascos:*—The Indians called by the Spaniards Tarascos, inhabited a large and flourishing territory to the west of that governed by the Aztecs, of whom they were independent allies.
- No. 11. Casa Grande:*—Like the "Big House" of our own Southern plantations; the master's home.
- No. 12. Tuna:*—The fruit of two kinds of cactus bears this name; the more common, that of the round-

leaved *nopal*, the other (the variety here meant) that of a branching or candelabra cactus.

No. 13. *Peones*:—The common people, usually day laborers, and hence, in many cases, serfs.

No. 14. *Fiesta*:—A feast or festival; synonymous with all holy days.

No. 15. *Corpus Christi*:—In Mexico this was, before the disestablishment of 1857, the most splendid festival of the Roman Catholic Church; it occurs on the Thursday after Trinity.

No. 16. *Barrancas*:—A *barranca* is a deep gorge.

No. 17. *Mescal*:—A very intoxicating liquor made of the root of a species of agave.

No. 18. *Tequila*:—Another liquor distilled from the same plant.

No. 19. *Aguardiente*:—A liquor derived from sugar cane or grapes.

No. 20. *Maguey*:—The noblest member of the agave family is known with us as the "Century Plant."

No. 21. *Hacienda*:—A large country estate. Some of the *haciendas* of Mexico comprise as many square miles as the State of Connecticut.

No. 22. *Administrador*:—Manager.

No. 23. *Moctezuma*:—Whom we call Montezuma, was the last of the Aztec emperors. He was de-throned by Cortés, and died in 1520.

No. 24. *Niñita*:—Little girl.

No. 25. *Porfiria*:—The heroine of our story was named for the most famous of Mexico's presidents, Porfirio Diaz.

- No. 26. Ay de mi:*—Alas!
- No. 27. Sarape:*—The square blanket which serves as cloak by day and cover by night to the Mexican Indian. The handiwork of these blankets is often very fine.
- No. 28. El temblor:*—The earthquake.
- No. 29. Vaquero:*—Herdsman; cowboy.
- No. 30. Peso:*—The Mexican dollar.
- No. 31. Centavos:*—A *centavo* is the hundredth part of a peso, corresponding to our cent.
- No. 32. Pajaritos Santos:*—Blessed little birds.
- No. 33. Hacendado:*—The owner, usually the hereditary owner, like an English squire, of a landed estate.
- No. 34. Burros:*—Donkeys.
- No. 35. Pantalones:*—The tight, often ornamented, trousers of the gentleman, in contradistinction to the loose cotton trousers of the *peón*.
- No. 36. Caballero:*—Literally, a horseman, hence, a gentleman.
- No. 37. Sala:*—Drawing-room.
- No. 38. Por Dios:*—Expletives are much more used in Spanish than in English: For God's sake.
- No. 39. Vireyes:*—Viceroys.
- No. 40. Pulque:*—A mildly intoxicating drink distilled from the agave which grows on the table-lands. Its use accounts for much of the degradation of the Mexican *peón* in these regions.
- No. 41. Conquistador:*—Conqueror. A term applied

invariably to Hernando Cortés. He and his army were the *conquistadores* of Mexico.

No. 42. *Que hombre*:—Literally, what a man! But *hombre* is a term of inferiority.

No. 43. *Cuidado*:—Take care!

No. 44. *A boca llena*:—In the open.

No. 45. *Mi amigo*:—My friend.

No. 46. *Mozo*:—A man-servant.

No. 47. *Con permiso*:—With your permission.

No. 48. *Jefe político*:—Literally, a political chief, or judge. Under the administration of President Diaz, the *jefe político* was appointed in each district by the Federal Government as its representative, and was responsible directly to this Government. In effect, the *jefe* was an autocratic spy.

No. 49. *Caramba*:—Expletive: Go to!

No. 50. *Mexican Land Law* (in special relation to the village shield):—Immediately after the conquest of Mexico, the lands were portioned out, as was natural, among the Spaniards. Certain Indian tribes, however, who had aided the conquerors, retained their lands; others kept them by force of arms. In the course of time, to protect the rights of the Indians, the Kings of Spain made notable enactments, forbidding serfdom, and confirming Indian communities in their right to a certain amount of land. Under these laws, each Indian commune held a portion of land called the *egido*, or shield, extending in a circle 600 *varas*, or 1800 feet from the village church, and in ad-

dition to this a square tract of 3600 feet base line. All the villages which were formerly robbed of their lands, had until recently at least, this possession. After the establishment of the Republic, the Constitution of Benito Juarez, in 1857, confirmed every holding of this kind. These lands were recorded by the municipal authorities for purposes of taxation, but not in any other way. During the latter part of the administration of President Diaz, many of these "village shields" and similar grants comprising in some cases fertile plains and valleys supporting a population of 20,000 souls, were seized by the Government, in accordance with a law passed for the purpose, as "unrecorded lands."

No. 51. *Madre mia*:—My Mother; in this case, an invocation to the Virgin.

No. 52. *Bandits*:—The history of Mexico is a history of notable bandits who, like Robin Hood, took toll of all travelers and even attacked fortified places for loot.

No. 53. *Virgin's Mantles*:—Blue convolvuli.

No. 54. *Varas*:—A *vara* is a yard.

No. 55. *Jarros*:—A *jarro* is a jar with one handle.

No. 56. *Machete*:—A heavy scimitar-shaped knife.

No. 57. *Olla*:—A round earthen pot.

No. 58. *Mesquite*:—A species of mimosa, common in arid and semi-arid America.

No. 59. *Andale, muchacho*:—Hurry, boy!

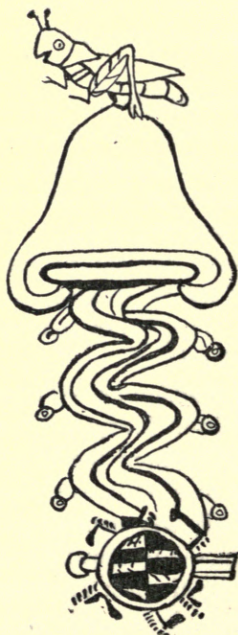
No. 60. *Zaguan*:—A courtyard gate.

- No. 61. Patio:*—The open square, usually laid out as a garden or gay with potted plants, about which the typical Mexican house is built.
- No. 62. Incommunicado:*—In solitary confinement.
- No. 63. Los Estados Unidos de America:*—The United States of America, in contradistinction to the United States of Mexico.
- No. 64. Portales:*—Arcades built over the sidewalks.
- No. 65. Nieve:*—Literally, snow. The common name for ices and ice cream.
- No. 66. Pronunciamiento:*—Proclamation.
- No. 67. Ojalá:*—Would to God; God grant!
- No. 68. Bastante:*—Enough.
- No. 69. Siesta:*—The after-luncheon nap indulged in in all hot countries.
- No. 70. Palacio de Gobernación:*—Palace of Government; State House.
- No. 71. Paseo:*—The drive.
- No. 72. Rebozo:*—A shawl.
- No. 73. Bandidos:*—Bandits.
- No. 74. Hermanita:*—Little sister.
- No. 75. Tierra caliente:*—Hot country; torrid zone. In Mexico the climate varies sharply with the altitude.
- No. 76. Tierra templada:*—Temperate country; temperate zone.
- No. 77. La Paz:*—Peace.
- No. 78. Hectare:*—Ten square meters.
- No. 79. Quién sabe:*—Who knows?
- No. 80. Zorillos:*—A *zorillo* is a skunk.

- No. 81. Padrecito*:—Little father.
- No. 82. Moctadir*:—The Moorish foe of the Spanish hero, the Cid.
- No. 83. Iguana*:—A large lizard.
- No. 84. Primavera*:—A species of hibiscus flowering very early in the spring.
- No. 85. Clavillina*:—Cottonwood tree.
- No. 86. Caritito*:—Little dear.
- No. 87. Barranca Azul*:—Blue Gorge.
- No. 88. Mirador*:—A pavilion.
- No. 89. Pico de Oro*:—Beak of gold; Golden beak.
- No. 90. Huitzitzilin*:—Tarascan name for hummingbird.
- No. 91. Papayas*:—Pawpaws.
- No. 92. Bien, muy bien*:—Good, very good.
- No. 93. Acequia*:—An irrigating sluice.
- No. 94. Floripundio*:—A tree with a large white flower resembling a morning glory.
- No. 95. Aztecs*:—An ancient people of Mexico who founded the City of Mexico, and from it ruled a vast empire. They were conquered by the Spaniards under Cortés.
- No. 96. Virgin of Guadalupe*:—The name under which the Blessed Virgin Mary is worshiped by the Indians, to one of whom she is said to have shown herself. Her most famous shrine is at Guadalupe.
- No. 97. Gicaras*:—Bowls made of gourds.
- No. 98. Calzontzin*:—The Spanish rendering of the Indian name for the last Tarascan king.
- No. 99. Soldadera*:—A woman who accompanies a

soldier as cook and general provider. All the Mexican armies are accompanied by women and often by children, the families of the soldiers.

*No. 100. Ley Fuga*:—(See title of Book II.) The law which held in case of offenders under suspicion or under arrest was that those who attempted escape could be shot with impunity. In the case of a criminal so disposed of, no investigation was ever made.

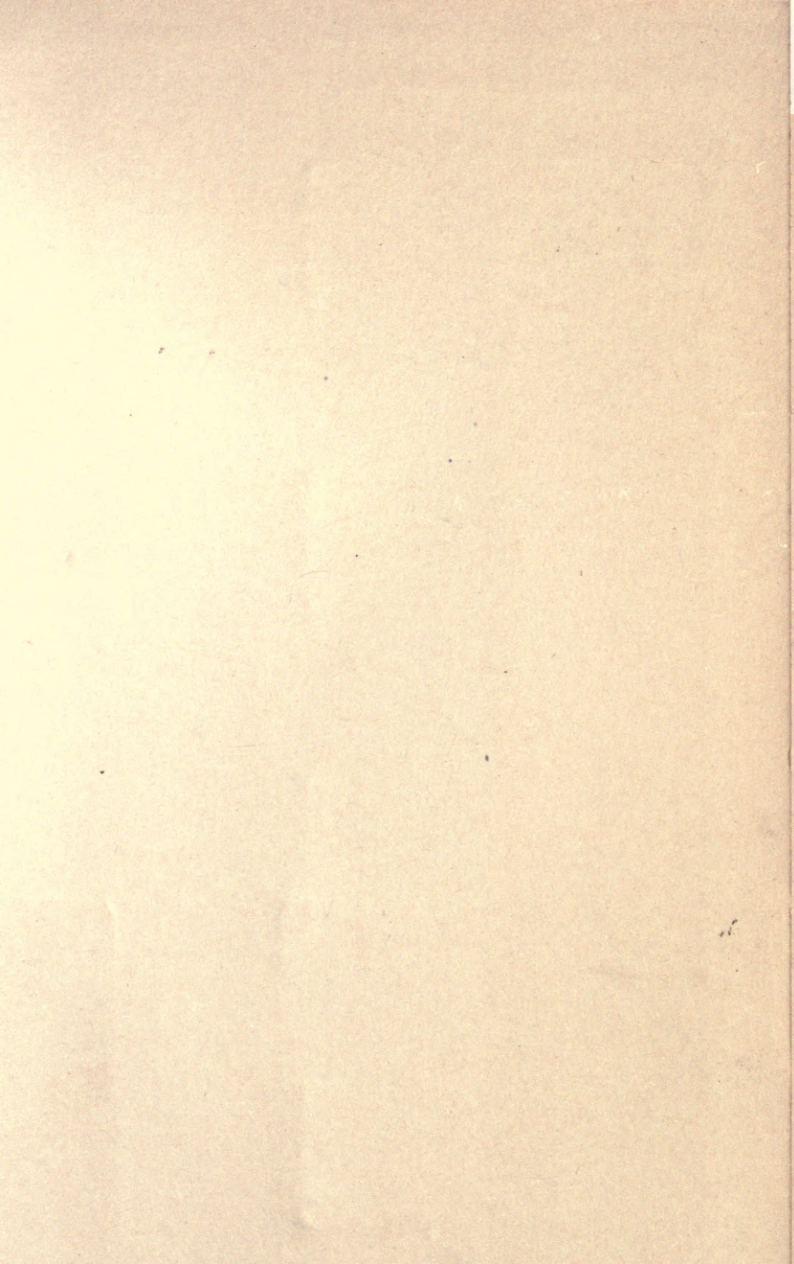
















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